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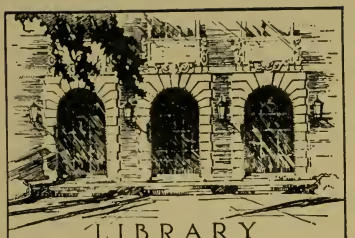
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MIRK ABBEY.

VOL. II.

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MIRK ABBEY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"LOST SIR MASSINGBERD;"

"THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE;"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

"MARY," said Lady Lisgard gravely, when her attendant had closed the door behind her, "I want to have a little serious talk with you to-night."

"As you please, my Lady," returned Mistress Forest, in a tone which the other did not fail to mark: it was a very respectful tone—a more humble one even than she was ordinarily wont to use—but there was a certain deliberation and set resolve about it too, which expressed as decidedly, as though

she had used the words: "I am ready to listen, madam; but I know very well what you are going to ask me, and I have made up my mind already to answer 'No.'"

"Mary," continued my Lady earnestly, but not without a tremor in her kind soft voice, "come and sit here on the sofa beside me, and let us not be mistress and maid to-night, but only friends."

"Yes, madam;" and Mary's voice trembled too, for this unlooked-for arrangement would place her, she knew, at a disadvantage in the argument which was certainly at hand. "We have known one another many, many years, Mary—more than half our lives—and I don't think we have had a single quarrel yet."

"Not one, ma'am, not one," assented the

waiting-maid; already, after the manner of her susceptible kind, beginning to cry.

"I can remember you when quite a child, Mary; not fifteen years old; as willing and kind-hearted a girl as the sun ever shone upon; and when I had not a friend in the world, nor even so much as a coin that I could call my own, and when I was weak and sick at heart, having lost all that was dear to me, I remember who it was that tended and caressed me as though I was her own sister."

"Don't ye, don't ye, my Lady; hush, hush!" cried the weeping Mary. "It was only natural that I should take to a sweet innocent creature cast at our very door by the raging sea. I often dream of that storm o' nights, madam, even now; of the thunder, and the lightning, and the rain; and of the flashes that were not lightning, but signals for help—that, alas!

we could not give—from the poor doomed ship. And how father and the other fishermen, and many of the visitors themselves—and among them poor Sir Robert—all crowded down to the Cove, for they could not get nearer to the shore because of the waves; and I was with them, sheltering myself in the brushwood as well as I could, and peering through the branches to see the great white waves lit up for an instant, and then the darkness shutting all things out except the roaring of the storm. I mind it just as though it were but yesterday; and ah! my Lady, shall I ever forget when that one great wave dashed up into the very Cove itself, wetting us all to the skin, and knocking down young Jack West, whom it almost carried back with it in its return, and then the Great Black Spar, which it did carry back, with

something white a-clinging to it; when my father cried out: 'O my God, a woman!' and all our hearts seemed stricken with a sudden shoot of pain. Lord! how I cried, for my part, to think that a poor creature should be tossing in that dreadful foam; and when I heard good Sir Robert's voice, clear and loud as a bugle: 'One hundred pounds to the man who brings her ashore, dead or alive!' I do believe I could have run out and kissed him. Ah, my Lady, what a noble gentleman he was; for though he could not have known how dear you were to be to him—you might have been an old woman, for all he could see—how he worked and strove to save you; not by his money alone, for no mere gain would have tempted men to do what was done that night, but by risking life and limb. They made a double chain, holding one

another's hands, for there was no time to spare for ropes, and went down almost among the breakers, where you were: my father and Sir Robert were the two first men, God bless them!"

Here Mistress Forest paused, interrupted by incipient hysterics, and my Lady herself cried like a child, but not in agony; her tears were tribute to the memory of a gallant deed.

"I mind my father had a black shoulder —a place you could not cover with both your hands—all along of the spar being driven up against him, but they carried it up with you upon it safe into the Cove, and then there was a great cry for us women to come down and help. Ah, how beautiful you looked, my Lady, though we thought you dead, white, and cold, and wet, with your

long black hair dripping like sea-weed, and your tender limbs all bruised and bleeding. It must have been a kind hand as tied you to the plank, for between your dainty waist and the rough rope there was bound a sailor's jacket."

My Lady moaned, and held her hands up as though she would say, "Forbear!" but Mistress Forest could not be stayed.

"There was little enough clothes upon you, poor Lady, just a bodice and a petticoat, but round your neck there was hung a charm or two, and perhaps that had some hand in saving you from drowning."

My Lady looked quickly up; how strange it seemed that the comment passed by Mary Forest upon the locket (and the bundle of letters in their little waterproof case) should have been so exactly what Derrick had

pointed out it would be. The coincidence reminded her of the task that lay before her, and of the danger of delaying it.

"Yes, Mary, I indeed owe my life to you and yours, and I am not forgetful of the debt. Your welfare is, and ever will be, only second in importance to that of my own children, and it is concerning it that I now wish to speak with you. Your future"——

"You owe me nothing, my dear Lady, that you have not paid again and again, I am sure," interrupted the waiting-maid hurriedly. "When you rose to that high station, for which it seems to everybody you were born, your hand was always held out to me; through good report and evil report, you have ever stood my friend: it will be a great wrench of my heart, dearest mistress, when I leave

your service—as I shall have to do, I fear, very soon."

"Mary!"

"Yes, my Lady. You see I'm not a young girl now; and it is not everybody who has so good a chance as I have now of—of—settling in life. Service is not inheritance, you know, my Lady, although I am well aware I should never want for nothing"——

"Whether I live or die, Mary," broke in her mistress eagerly, "I have taken care of that, good friend; and if I should die to-morrow—— But you shall see my will itself, for it lies here."

She laid her hand upon the desk before her, but Mary checked her with a determined "No, my Lady; no. I was never greedy—with all my faults, you will grant that much, I know—and if I had been like Mrs Welsh,

and others of this household I could name—but that I never was a mischief-maker—I might long since have put myself beyond all need of legacies, and you never would have missed it. But Mr Derrick is himself a person of property; a very rich man indeed for one in my condition of life—not that I need be a burden upon any man, thank Heaven, for I have money saved out of my wages—and very handsome they always were—and that great present of good Sir Robert's still untouched: the most generous of gentlemen he was. I am sure, my Lady, nobody felt for you as I did when Sir Robert died; and you have often said how terrible it was to lose a husband; therefore" —here for a moment her excessive volubility flagged for the first time; she paused, and reddened, then added, with the air of a

mathematician stating an indisputable corollary —"therefore, you must allow, dear mistress, that to *find* one—particularly when one comes to my time of life—is not unpleasant, nor a chance to be lightly thrown aside."

"That depends entirely upon the sort of husband he may be, Mary," observed my Lady gravely.

"Really, dear madam, with all respect, I think I am the best judge of that," rejoined the waiting-maid tartly; "although, indeed, I never thought to say such words to you. Sir Richard may have his likes and dislikes, but I am not his slave; nor yet his servant, for the matter of that. While Master Walter, who, saving your presence, everybody knows to be worth a hundred of him, likes Ralph very much."

A pang shot across my Lady's face, and

left it crimson, as though she had received a blow; but the waiting-maid little knew what had brought the colour there, although she felt that she had pained her mistress deeply.

"God forgive me," cried she penitently, "if my foolish tongue has hurt your feelings, my Lady! I did not mean to say aught against Sir Richard, I am sure. I scarcely knew what I said, for when those are dear to us—as Ralph has grown to be with me, and I don't deny it—are misjudged and wronged, why, then, we are apt to say bitter things. This talk was none of my seeking, my Lady; and although Ralph thinks that you are to blame because of his being forbidden the Hall, and all the rest of it, I have always told him you have never said a word to set me against him; and oh, I am

sorry you are doing it now, because what is done cannot be undone, and"——

"Great Heaven! you are not married to this man?" cried my Lady, rising from her seat with agitation.

"O no, my Lady—certainly not, my Lady," rejoined the waiting-maid with a certain demure dignity. "There has been nothing underhand between us in the matter at all, except, that is, so far as meeting Mr Derrick at the back gate"——

"Did you go out to meet him *to-night?*" inquired Lady Lisgard sharply, and keeping her eyes fixed steadily upon her attendant's face.

"No, madam, I did not."

"She is speaking truth," murmured my Lady to herself. "Who, then, could it be whom I saw upon the churchyard path just now?"

"Although," continued Mrs Forest quietly, "I don't deny that I have often met him after dusk, no other time being permitted to us; but to-day he has gone to town."

"And you are to write to him thither to give him your final decision as to whether you will become his wife or not."

"How on earth do you know that, my Lady?" inquired the waiting-maid with a curiosity even beyond her indignation.

"I *do* know it, dear old friend," answered Lady Lisgard tenderly, "and it is because of that knowledge that I have sent for you to-night, to strive to persuade you to write 'No,' while there is yet time."

It was very seldom — not once in a year, perhaps — that Mary Forest was ever out of temper with my Lady; but then such a supreme occasion as the present had never

occurred before. Underneath their mere superficial relation of mistress and servant, they were more like elder and younger sister; but then even sisters quarrel when the one wants the other — generally under some pretence of mere prudence, not to be listened to by a woman of spirit—to give up the man of her choice. The ample countenance of Mistress Forest expressed something more than Decision in the negative; there was an unpleasant smile upon her pale lips, which seemed to say: "If you knew what I know, you would know that you are wasting your breath." She sat with her plump hands folded before her, like a naughty boy that has been put in the corner, but who does not care—nay, more, who knows that he has got a cracker to put presently under his master's chair, the

results of which will make full amends for the inconvenience he at present experiences.

"I will say nothing more, Mary, of the mutual esteem and affection between us two, and of the pain that an eternal parting—such as your marriage with this Mr Derrick would most undoubtedly entail—needs must cost us both. I presume that you have weighed that matter in your mind, and found it—however weighty—insufficient to alter your determination?"

Mary nodded, sharply enough, but it was doubtful if she could have spoken. Already her features had lost their rigidity, as though melted by my Lady's touching tones.

"You have known this person—that is to say, you have met him some dozen times—during a period of less than four months;

yet such is his influence over you, that you are prepared to sacrifice for him a friend of thirty years' standing, a comfortable home, and a position in which you are respected by all who know you. If I was speaking to a young girl, Mary, I should not advance these arguments; but you are a—a wise and sensible woman, and yet not of such a mature age that you need despair of finding a suitable partner for the rest of your life."

Mistress Forest heaved a little sigh of relief, and her cheeks began to tone down to something like their natural crimson; they *had* been purple with the apprehension of what my Lady might have said upon the subject of age.

"Now, what is it," pursued my Lady, "which has produced this confidence in an

almost entire stranger? Do you know anything of his former life, which may be a guarantee to you for the stability of your future? Have you ever met a single individual who is acquainted with it in any way? For all you know, this man may have been a"——

"My Lady!"

For a moment, the relative position of Mentor and pupil were exchanged; there was a quiet power about the waiting-maid's rebuke, for which an archbishop would have given more than his blessing, if he could only have incorporated it into a "charge."

"You are right, Mary," said my Lady frankly; "let us only speak of what is within our own knowledge. Does this man's own conduct, then, give any

promise of lasting happiness to the woman who may become his wife? Is he sober?"

"I believe he is fond of a glass, my Lady, as most men are who have no home, or people to look after them. If he had a wife, he would never go to the public-house at all, perhaps—he tells me so himself."

My Lady smiled faintly.

"Is he industrious and provident, Mary?"

"He has earned his money hardly enough, my Lady, and it seems only natural that he should now spend a little in enjoying himself."

"But not fling his money to left and right —I use your own words, dear Mary— and treat every chance-companion he comes across to liquor. Do you suppose that

at his age he is likely to change habits of this sort?"

"I am not aware, my Lady, that his age is anything against him," replied the waiting-maid coldly. "He is not so like to run through his money as if he were younger, and particularly when he has got some one to provide for beside himself. And indeed, so far as money goes, he has thousands of pounds; and if all goes well with him—and something has occurred to-day about which he has sent me a line by hand, dear fellow, by which it has been made almost certain that things *will* go well—he will be a very rich man indeed after a week or two. There is some great race on Epsom Downs"——

"O Mary, how can you talk so cheerfully of money acquired in that way. If it is won to-day, it is lost to-morrow; and even if it

were not so, do you know that it is gained from those who can ill afford to lose it, and who, having lost it, often turn to wicked ways?"

"I don't know about that, my Lady, I'm sure," responded the waiting-maid demurely; "I leave all these things to my betters. But, I suppose, if racing was a crime, Mr Chifney would not be let to have the Abbey Farm—Sir Richard being so very particular—and Master Walter would not for ever be up at the stables. Why, he and Mr Derrick are both together, hand and glove, in this very business —something about a French racer, it is; although, when you and I were at Dijon, my Lady, we never heard of there being such a thing in all France, did we?—so my poor Ralph cannot be so very wicked after all. And please, ma'am, it is no use saying any-

thing more about it, for I have written him that letter already which he was to find in London, and put it in the post."

"And did you answer 'Yes,' or 'No,' Mary?"

"I answered 'Yes,' my Lady—that I would marry him—and begging your pardon, madam, but I mean to stand to it."

CHAPTER II.

CONFESSION.

THERE is one serious disadvantage—which mistresses should do well to remember—at which waiting-maids are always placed in disputations with their domestic superiors; they cannot (except they are prepared for instant dismissal) either quit the room, and bang the door after them, or leave it open, and run down stairs "saying things" at the top of their voices. Both these modes of precedure, so natural to the female when "put out," are denied to them, for the same

reason that when on board ship they can't take champagne for sea-sickness as their employers do; they cannot afford the indulgence.

Now, although Mary Forest was not debarred by mere pecuniary considerations from flinging herself out of her mistress's room when she cried, "And I mean to stand to it," there were other reasons which prevented her from suiting to her words that very appropriate and natural action. In all her blinding passion (and she was really very angry), she never quite lost sight of the respect she owed her mistress. Her devotion to her was such, that even while she listened to her most unpalatable arguments against the man she had accepted for her husband, her heart smote her with a sense of ingratitude towards the long-tried friend, who,

after all, she knew, was anxious for her happiness rather than for her own mere comfort; and when she seemed most obstinate, she had often been nearest to throwing herself upon her mistress's neck, and exclaiming: "You are quite right, my Lady; and I believe I have been an old fool all along." It was more with the desire of putting a stop to this most unpleasant dispute, than because her determination was absolutely adamantine and inflexible, that she once more reiterated: "Yes, my Lady, I mean to stand to it," and fixed her eyes doggedly upon the floor, as though she would not even encounter another questioning glance.

"Mary," said her mistress solemnly, and after a long silence, "I am grieved beyond all power of words to tell at what you have just said; but the mischief may not yet be

quite past mending. I have seen this—Mr Derrick—this very night, and therefore he will not receive your letter till, at earliest, to-morrow evening."

"No, nor then neither, my Lady, so far as that goes, for I was late for the London post; I put the letter in the box for the very reason that I might not be persuaded to change my mind by"——

"Then it has not yet left the village post-office," interrupted my Lady, hastily snatching up her bonnet from the table on which she had wearily put it down upon entering the room: "there is time to stop it yet."

"No, my Lady; I heard the postman's horn half an hour ago; and if it were otherwise, nothing would induce me to alter what I have already written—nothing—nothing!" repeated Mistress Forest, emphasising

her last two words by beating with her foot upon the carpet.

"Alas, dear friend, you know not what you say," replied my Lady very gravely. "Give me your hand, Mary; nay, do not withdraw it coldly, for you will have need of comfort and support, almost as much, alas, as I—— *Mary, Mary, this man is married already!*" The waiting-maid started from her seat with a shrill scream.

"I don't believe it, I won't believe it; it is false. How dare you tell a lie to me, Lady Lisgard, only to gain your ends?"

"Hush, hush, Mary; did you ever know me to tell a lie, my friend? It is true as that yonder moon is rising, that this man has a wife alive. Do not weep so passionately."

"The perjured villain; the false, bad man; the wicked, wicked wretch!" cried the waiting-maid, her eyes flashing through their tears.

"Nay, above all, do not blame *him*, Mary, for he knows it not himself; he does not, indeed."

"What? Not know whether he's married or not!" sobbed the unhappy bride-elect. "I don't believe *that*, at all events, even if I believe *you*. He has married so many, he doesn't know rightly who is his wife; that is what you mean, I see. Sailors are all alike. O dear, dear, dear, when Mrs Welsh comes to know of it! And the monster will have got my letter by to-morrow night, to shew about! How nearly have I been committing bi—bi—bigamy!"

"Calm yourself, dear Mary, calm yourself.

Your trouble is nothing to what I suffer, and must continue to endure for my life long."

"Ah, my Lady, I daresay it is very bad to be a widow; but it's much worse to die an old—— leastways, at forty-fi—or forty-four, rather—to lose—— O dear! what an honest man he looked, and such a beard and eyes! I will never trust to appearances again. I daresay, it is very wrong, my Lady, but I fee—fee—feel as though I could tear Mrs Derrick's eyes out; I do, indeed." Here the bottle of smelling-salts, which upon a certain occasion we saw used by Mary Forest for the recovery of her mistress, had to change hands. The unfortunate waiting-maid was taken with a very genuine fit of hysterics, and not of the quiet sort either; and if her senses left her,

it could not certainly be said that she also lost the use of her limbs. At last, exhausted in body, but also more reasonable as to her mind, she whispered: "Mistress, dearest, tell me all you know." Then my Lady knew that the time was come for her first self-humiliation. Throughout the narrative that followed, they were sitting upon the sofa together, hand in hand, but each had her face averted from the other, and only now and then, by a convulsive grasp of the fingers, did Mary shew her sympathy with her unhappy mistress. At first, she was too full of her own trouble to interrupt by words, but soon the astounding revelation from my Lady's lips overwhelmed every faculty of speech within her, and she sat like a child who listens to a horrid story in the darkening twilight.

"We have known one another more than half our lives, Mary, said I, a while ago, and yet there has been a secret between us all that time. I have never kept anything else from you, but this was not mine alone to tell; it was Sir Robert's also. When he asked me to become his wife at Coveton, and you thought me so mad for first refusing him, and afterwards for demanding such a long delay, I had a reason for it, which he knew, but which you have never guessed. I was then the three-weeks' bride of another man.—You may well start, Mary, but that is the dreadful truth. The man, Ralph Gavestone, whom I mourned so deeply, as being drowned with my dear parents, and all the rest of the ship's company, in that great storm—which I would to Heaven had whelmed me in its waves—was not my

half-brother, as Sir Robert persuaded me to give out, but my husband."

"You had no wedding-ring, my Lady, when you came ashore," murmured the waiting-maid half incredulously.

"That is true, Mary. I know not how it was, but perhaps the cold and wet of that dreadful night made my fingers shrink—you remember how wan and thin I looked—and the ring must have dropped off; I never saw it after I reached land. But I was none the less a widow—as I thought; and although friendless, save for you, Mary—homeless and penniless, I thought I could never take another husband to my arms, although the raging sea had worked that rough divorce between us. At first, I replied: 'No, Sir Robert, never;' you will bear me witness that I did. Then, when he pressed

me still, I bargained for three years. I thought that he would tire of waiting for me, and get some fitter mate in the meantime; I did, as Heaven is my judge. I was true to my poor Ralph—he had saved me upon that spar at the risk, and, as I then believed, at the sacrifice of his own life—as long as I—nay, I was true to him in a sense for ever. Sir Robert was well aware of that. I do not need justification from man or woman; God himself absolved me, I think, so far. But that was an evil day, Mary, when I married. I was no more Sir Robert's wife than you were, Mary. Think of that. And he was not my husband. And our children, of whom he was so proud, are baseborn—bastards. Sir Richard—is it not terrible? do you not wonder that I live and am not mad?—he is not Sir Richard.

And my dear, dear Walter, he is baseborn too. And Letty—for whom her eldest brother thinks nobody too high—she, too, is no Lisgard. If I had waited seven years instead of three, this would not have been so. There are law-books in the library which have told me so much; but I have no adviser—none; no friend—yes, you, Mary, I know—but not one who can help me. Is not this something worse than death itself which has fallen upon me!"

"And this man Derrick — he was Gavestone?" whispered Mary Forest in a hoarse grating voice.

"Yes; did I not tell you so? I only found it out last Christmas Eve. I knew his voice, and I knew the carol that he sang. For one thing only do I thank Heaven—I who had reason, as I thought, to be thank-

ful for so many things—that Sir Robert is not alive. His sleep in yonder churchyard is disturbed by no such ghastly dream. Ah, happy dead!"

"Mistress, beloved mistress," cried the waiting-maid, in an agony of remorse—"forgive me that I have been thinking of myself these many weeks, while you have been so burdened and tormented. Henceforth, I am yours only. As I hope to get to heaven when I die, I will be true to you whatever happens. Let us think what that may be."

"Nay, let us *not* think," exclaimed her mistress with a shudder, "or I shall lose my wits. Would you have me picture what this house would be should *he* come hither and claim me for his wife? Richard and he beneath the self-same roof, and he the

master! Would Walter—though he herds with him, you say—brook this man as his equal? Would he not loathe him rather, and how soon, ah me! unlearn the love he owes to me—his wretched mother! I cannot bear to think of it, I tell you. Let us act; let us be doing something—something! How my brain whirls! Think for me, Mary—pray for me, for Heaven is deaf, alas, to my poor prayers!"

But even while she spoke, the gracious tears began to fill the furrows in her cheeks, which until now had been dry throughout her talk; and having told her friend, the weight about her heart was lifted off a little, and the tightness round her brow was loosened by the blessed hand of sympathy.

"I must write to him at once," said

Mary thoughtfully. "How fortunate that he did not leave Mirk until to-night. The two letters will now reach him at the same time. He cannot write in answer to the one which—which I wrote first—without having read the other; that will be something saved."

My Lady shook her head.

"There is but little hope in that, I fear; for he himself has this night told me—yes, I saw him face to face, Mary, only I was thickly veiled, thank Heaven—he told me frankly (thinking I did not wish to lose my waiting-maid) that he should lay it to my charge if your reply was 'No,' and should not take it as the answer of your heart. How much more, if he gets a refusal coming so quickly upon the very heels of this acceptance, will he decline to believe

it comes from your own self. More likely, it would cause him, reckless as he is, to do something rash and vengeful — perhaps to return hither on the instant, and—— O Mary, Mary, I would give five thousand pounds this day, if that would stop his coming to Mirk again!"

"Would that *not* stop him, mistress?" asked the waiting-maid with earnest gravity. "Five thousand pounds is a fortune, is it not?"

"It would not stop *him*, Mary," rejoined my Lady sadly. "Ralph Gavestone, even in his youth-time, never valued money a fillip when weighed against a whim; and now his will is more a law to him than ever. I have never known Resolve so fixed as I read it in his eyes this night. And if he guessed the truth, Mary—oh, if he did but

dream that I, his lawful wife, for whom he had gladly laid his own life down, whose memory he has kept fresh and green when all else has withered, whose loss has been his ruin, was playing him false!—he said himself, that on his reckless soul 'twas like as not there might be murder some day—and, Mary, I do believe him."

White as the very moonbeams was my Lady's face, and the hand trembled which held the handkerchief she passed across her damp white brow.

"Not for myself, good Mary, is this fear," gasped she, "but for my dear ones—do you hear them yonder? is it not sad to listen to such mirth?—for this unhappy man being wronged, becomes a madman straightway. Not disgrace alone may fall upon us here, not only shame—think of that, Mary; not

only shame upon Sir Richard and the rest! but even Crime may visit us. This house of dead Sir Robert—once the home of peace, and genial ease, and hospitality—— But that shall never be; no, they shall never meet, my sons and he; I will die rather, and my corpse would part them wide enough."

"O mistress, talk not so; you freeze my very blood. What was it we were saying before you began to look like this?"

"You talked of bribing this Ralph Gavestone—for how could I offer him gold save *as* a bribe! But if a bribe, what need was there to bribe him? Why should I wish him once more upon the other side of the world? Why pay him a younger brother's portion, to quit the courtship of my waiting-maid? No, Mary, this man is no mere rogue, that he should take his money without ques-

tion, and be off; he is suspicious, keen—and ah, if wronged, as implacable as Death itself."

"One moment, my Lady!" cried Mistress Forest leaping to her feet. "I do believe I have a plan to get that letter back."

"Ah, good Heaven! What is it, wise, kind heart?"

"See, madam," and she began to reckon on her plump fingers, with her pleasant face aglow with mingled joy and astonishment at her own sagacity: "the note was put in late for the London post from Dalwynch; it will therefore remain there, though it has left Mirk, all to-night, and not be forwarded till the morning mail. If we drive over to-morrow early—starting, say, at six o'clock—we shall be in plenty of time to stop its going further. In the meantime, I will write another letter in its place."

"You have saved me—for this time—I do believe, dear Mary; yes, we can drive to Dalwynch—I will give orders for the carriage to be ready at six—and still be back at the Abbey by breakfast-time. If we are pressed for the reason, we can give the true one—to a certain point, if needs must be—you had a mind to alter what you have written to your suitor."

CHAPTER III.

CONTRARY TO THE REGULATIONS OF HER MAJESTY'S POST-OFFICE.

SORELY did the fat coachman, who had no neck, inveigh against that caprice of his mistress which compelled his appearance at the front door upon the ensuing morning at an hour so altogether unexampled. If he had but heard that it was all upon the account of Mistress Forest, and the outlandish fellow who wore little gold rings in his ears, and that curly beard, so like the door-mat of the servants-hall, it is doubtful whether

he would have obeyed such a premature behest at all; but as it was, he was sitting on the coach-box with the sleek nags before him, at the foot of the great steps which led down from the entrance-hall, at six o'clock to a minute. It was broad daylight of course, so bright that it made him wink again, as it flashed upon the glittering harness and the shining skins of the pampered beasts; but still it was not a time for a man of his years and girth to be hurried up and made to toil. "As late as you please at night, my Lady, and nobody ever heard Joe Wiggins utter a murmur," muttered he; "but there 's no constitushun as can stand such wear and tear as *this*."

However that might be with Mr Wiggins, Miss Rose Aynton seemed to make uncommonly light of early rising, for, much to the

astonishment of her hostess, she was up and dressed and in the breakfast-room when that lady made her appearance at half-past five.

"I happened to hear that you were going out betimes, dear Lady Lisgard," said she with her sweetest smile; "and getting up in these first summer mornings is *such* a treat to a poor London-bred girl like me; so, without saying a word to dearest Letty, I thought I would just fill her place for once, and make your coffee for you."

"Thank you, Rose," returned my Lady a little stiffly, for she had not intended that anybody, and far less one who was not a member of her own family, should have been a witness to her departure. "I have unpleasant business on hand which takes me to Dalwynch before the morning train starts."

"If you are going to London," began Rose hesitatingly, as if intending to send something by my Lady's hands to her aunt, "if it was not too much trouble"——

"I am not going to London," replied Lady Lisgard quietly. "I shall be back by the usual breakfast-hour, I have no doubt."

Here my Lady sipped her coffee with the air of a connoisseur, and perceiving Miss Aynton was about to ask more questions, requested a little sugar; then a fresh supply of—no, not hot milk—some cream. Would the carriage never come round, and release her from this importunate girl.

"How glad the people will be to see you about again once more, Lady Lisgard," observed Miss Aynton cheerfully. "You can't imagine how curious they have been to know why you have shut yourself up so long."

"I was not aware that my movements were any business of theirs, Rose," returned my Lady with severity, "nor, indeed, of anybody's except myself."

"Very true," answered Miss Aynton carelessly; "that is what I always told them. Besides, it is not pleasant to run the chance of meeting a rude and perhaps half-drunken ruffian like this man Derrick, when one knows he has made up his mind to address one upon the first opportunity."

"Indeed!" said my Lady scornfully, "I assure you I was quite unaware of that dreadful menace." She stole a glance over her cup, to see if there was anything to read in this strange girl's face; but there was nothing. As soon as she had finished her duties in connection with the coffee-

pot, she had taken a piece of fancy-work in her hands, in the execution of which she seemed entirely wrapped up.

"O yes; of course it is most ridiculous, but that is what all the village has been saying for these five months, more or less; and now that you are going out for the first time, when he has but left the place overnight, they are sure to say"——

"How do you know, Rose, that this man left Mirk last night?" inquired my Lady, setting down her cup, and looking at the young girl fixedly. Could it possibly have been *she* whom she had beheld lurking about the churchyard wall, and perhaps listening to the conversation, in the course of which Derrick had announced his intention of going at that late hour to Dalwynch, so as to be in time for the first up-train upon the morrow?

A faint flush stole over Miss Aynton's face, but by no means such a blush as is called "tell-tale:" it might easily enough have been caused by the mere directness of the question. "Your son, Mr Walter, told me," replied she simply —"he is a great ally of this man's, you know.—Here is the carriage. I am afraid you will find it very dull, Lady Lisgard, taking this long drive all alone. If I thought that my company"——

"Thank you, Rose," replied my Lady hastily; "it is most kind of you to offer it; but the fact is, I am going to take Forest with me. This visit to Dalwynch is mainly upon her account indeed. If the chariot held more than two, perhaps I should take you at your word; but as it is—— See, I have a book for my

companion.—Come, Forest; we have no time to lose."

Mary had entered the room while she was speaking, and gave quite a start at seeing Miss Aynton at the breakfast-table. Her mistress was already cloaked, and had her bonnet on.

"To Dalwynch, my Lady?" said the footman, having put up the steps and closed the chariot-door.

"Yes; drive fast."

"Which part of the town, my Lady?" for there were two roads to the post-town, the relative length of which from the Abbey depended upon what part of the place was to be visited.

Miss Aynton was standing on the last flight of the stone steps, and could hear every word that was spoken.

"Take the lower road," replied my Lady very distinctly; and the well-hung chariot—pleasantest invention save the fair-weather Hansom, which the wit of coachmakers has yet sought out—rolled swiftly along the gravelled road.

"Then they are not going to the railway station," exclaimed Rose aloud.

"No, miss," assented the butler, as he stood at the open hall-door, regarding nature as though it were a novelty to him at that hour. "I should say it must be the post-office. Perhaps my Lady wishes to get the letters this morning earlier than the Mirk's man can bring them."

"Very likely, Roberts," returned the young lady, a little disconcerted at her involuntary remark having been overheard. "Let us hope she will have good news. But I should

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scarcely have thought it was necessary to have gone herself."

"Well, I am not so sure, miss. Mrs Rudd, the post-mistress at Dalwynch, is a great stickler for forms and that, and she might have made some difficulty, particularly as she did not obtain her place through our influence."

"*Whose* influence, Roberts?"

"Ours, miss, to be sure. The Lisgard interest, you see, was given last election to the losing side. Although time was, I can well recollect, when poor Sir Robert had everything of that sort at his disposal that was vacant in these parts; but them yallers, they have gone and spoilt it all this time." And with a sigh of regret for the golden age of patronage, and a shake of the head directed against the levelling opinions at present in

the ascendant, Mr Roberts went off to his breakfast.

No sooner had the wheels of the chariot began to move, than Lady Lisgard observed to her companion: "You have the letter with you that I dictated last night, have you not?"

"Yes, my Lady; here it is, though not sealed down, in case you might have thought of anything to add."

"No, Mary," said her mistress, perusing it; "there is nothing here that I can better by thought, although I spent all night in thinking over it. A refusal could scarce be made shorter or more decided than this; there is not a trace of vacillation to give the most sanguine suitor hope." Then, as if some other idea was expressing itself almost in spite of herself, she added: "Do I not look deadly pale, Mary?"

"Very white and worn, madam, as you well may."

"But bad enough for people to observe who did not know the cause?"

"For some people, madam. *She* saw it sharp enough, if you mean *her*, my Lady," and the waiting-maid made a significant gesture in the direction of Miss Rose Aynton. "Nothing escapes *her*, bless you—nothing; and the sooner she's out of the house, under present circumstances—and indeed under every circumstance, in my opinion—the better."

"You never liked her from the first, Mary," said her mistress in the tone of one who argues against her own conviction. "We should not be uncharitable in our judgments of others, and particularly as respects young folks; we often set down as serious faults what in them is only thoughtlessness."

"Miss Aynton is none of that sort, my Lady; she always thinks before she speaks, and takes a good long look before she leaps; and for all she seems as though butter would not melt in her mouth, she's as full o' schemes as a cat at a dairy-door. If there's cream to be got in this world, she'll get it, my Lady, I'll go bail, let the butter-milk fall to whose share it will."

"I confess that I can't quite understand her," said my Lady musing. "I am sure, when she first came, she seemed simple and unobtrusive enough; while, on the other hand, in her manner towards me of late"——

"Downright impudence, I call it, my Lady, in such a chit as she."

"Well, I don't say that; but she is certainly not so respectful as she might be. I shall be sorry to send her back to London just as the

summer is beginning, to live with her cross old aunt, whom she appears to dislike so; but I confess I think she has been here long enough."

"Much too long, my Lady, much too long," answered Mrs Forest gravely; "she has set more people in the house by the ears than you wot of. While Anne Rees, who used to be Miss Letty's maid, one would think Miss Aynton was her mistress now, so entirely has she got her under her thumb. She has ferreted out some folly of Anne's—Heaven knows how she did it, or what it is; but the girl's her slave. From whom but her did she learn that you were starting at this hour? And, again, why was not Miss Letty told as well as Miss Rose? Do you suppose she would have let anybody else make coffee for her mamma, if she had been aware of

your departure? No, no. Then Miss Aynton will take credit to herself for not permitting Miss Letty to be called, and fatigue herself by getting up so early. Nasty, sly young hussy! That's just her way; uncommon civil, kind, and attentive until she gets the upper hand, and finds you under her thumb; then you begin to know her. We've found her out in the servants-hall, although she makes a fool of old Roberts yet. She actually told him, that at the last dinner-party at the Abbey she thought him the most distinguished-looking person in the room; but only wait till she catches him some afternoon at the Madeira! then he'll be her obedient, humble servant, without having any more pretty speeches. That's a bad, bold girl, ma'am, let her be ten times a lady born."

Here Mistress Forest, indignantly tossing

her head back, without making due allowance for her bonnet, came into sharp contact with the back of the chariot, and severely bit her tongue. My Lady was thereby enabled to interpose a remark.

"But why have you not told me a word of this before, Mary? I would never have permitted a guest of mine, and particularly a young lady to whom I stand in the relation of guardian while she is under my roof, first to ingratiate herself with my servants, and then to tyrannise over them in the way you describe. I never heard of anything more atrociously mean, and I think you have been wanting in your duty—let alone your personal regard for me, Mary—to have concealed the matter so long."

"Begging your pardon, my Lady, you have nobody to blame but yourself for that,"

observed the waiting-maid with asperity. "The only harsh words you ever spoke to me were about certain of Mrs Welsh's doings, of which I complained with reason, though I do not wish to refer to them now. What you said was this: 'Never abuse the affectionate relation in which we two stand, Mary, by causing me to side with you against your fellow-servants. I can deny you nothing, but do not vex me with tale-bearing. I hate all vulgar gossip, and despise those who bring it.' After a setting-down like that, it was not likely that I should give tongue about Miss Aynton's ways, nor let you know how she has made Anne Rees a spy upon us all. No, no; mind your own business, Mary Forest, says you; and I've minded it, my Lady, ever since."

"Do not be angry with me, friend," returned Lady Lisgard sadly; "I daresay I was wrong; and even if not, I have no heart to argue with you now."

"And no wonder, poor dear," assented the waiting-maid, greatly mollified. "I was a brute to bring it up against you just now in all this trouble; nor was it the right time, perhaps, to speak about Miss Aynton's goings on. Only you yourself said her manner was not quite what it used to be, and I was so afraid that she might be getting *you*, my Lady, under her thumb."

"How could that possibly be, Mary? She surely cannot have the slightest suspicion of"——

"She sniffs something, my Lady, or she would not have been making your coffee this morning. However, let her sniff, only be you

very careful to lock your desk; and when you want to say anything to me about you know who, come out of earshot of the key-hole of your own door.—Ah, wouldn't she, though? But I know better. A thief? No, I didn't say a thief, although, for the matter of that, she has a mind to steal from you, or I am much mistaken, something you value most on earth—your son. There now, I've said it."

And the waiting-maid drew a very long breath, as though some oppressive weight was off her mind at last. She evidently expected her mistress to express astonishment, if not horror; and it was positively a disappointment to her when my Lady replied calmly: "I know all about that, Mary; but you are doing Miss Aynton wrong. She might have been my daughter-in-law if she

liked, and yet, to my certain knowledge, she refused to be so."

"She *refused?*"

"Most certainly she did. My son made her an offer in my presence, and she rejected him.—But here we are at Dalwynch. Tell Wiggins to stop at the post-office. Thank Heaven, there is plenty of time to spare. How my heart does beat!"

The waiting-maid pulled the check-string, and delivered her mistress's orders, but quite mechanically, without knowing what she said. In spite of the importance of what she had now so immediately to do, her mind was entirely occupied with the wonder of what she had just heard, and she kept repeating to herself: "And she rejected him? and she rejected him?" while her heightened eyebrows almost amalgamated with her hair.

Perhaps some of this excessive astonishment was due to poor Mistress Forest's peculiar position; she thought it so strange that one of her own sex should reject any man—who was not already married to somebody else.

"Here is the post-office, Mary. Mind you speak very civilly to the woman, and make haste; I shall be in a perfect fever till I see you come back with that dreadful letter safe in your hand."

One minute, two minutes, three minutes—each seeming an hour to my Lady, shrinking in a corner of the chariot, while the omnibus to the station passed and repassed, picking up she knew not what passengers, and bearing Derrick himself, for all she knew, within it. At last Lady Lisgard could endure the suspense no longer. "John,"

said she to the footman standing beside the door, "what is Forest about? Why does she not return?"

"She is talking to Mrs Rudd, my Lady. I think there is some dispute about a letter; for they are both in the post-office department."

"Let me out, John," exclaimed my Lady impatiently; and the next instant she had entered Mrs Rudd's establishment. This was, for the most part, a grocer's shop; one-fifth of it only being reserved for the reception and despatch of Her Majesty's mails. There were no customers at that still early hour; a young man who was sanding the floor with some ostentation, as though to imply that *all* the sand went that way, and none into the sugar, made a respectable pause as my Lady's silk swept by; and another, who

appeared to be washing his hands in tea, assumed that sickly smile which is supposed by persons of his class to conciliate people of quality; but Mrs Rudd herself, intrenched behind her little post-office palisade, gave no sign of gracious welcome, and from out the pigeon-hole through which she distributed her stamps, her words poured forth in an undiminished stream of denial and severity; nay, I doubt whether the presence of my Lady did not intensify the bitterness of its tone.

"Whatever importance it may be to you to get this letter, Mistress Forest," cried she, addressing poor Mary, who was looking very disconsolate, and not a little angry also, "it is of much greater moment to me that I should keep it. It is as much as my place is worth to give a letter back

which has once been given into my charge; and I am not aware that I owe that place to my Lady Lisgard, and therefore feel called upon to risk—— I beg pardon, your Ladyship—but I did not catch sight of you before. What your servant has come to ask of me is something out of the question. I will post this second letter for her—although it is two minutes past the time, even with an extra stamp, for *that*—but as for returning her this other: yes, I have no doubt it's hers—although, for that matter, people's handwriting is often very like other people's—but directly it reached this box it became the property of the Postmaster-general. It is no more hers now than it is mine; and if I was to yield it up, it's a matter, madam, that might be brought before the assizes."

"Mrs Rudd," said my Lady quietly, "I hope, although your late husband and my son were not quite of the same way of thinking as to politics, that you do not look upon me in an unneighbourly light. I do not wish to insult you by offering you a bribe; but I may say this much, that nobody ever put me under an obligation yet, without my endeavouring to recompense them to the best of my power."

"Yes, my Lady — although I can't say as *I* have ever been overburdened with favours at your Ladyship's hands — I know what sugar and currants goes to the Abbey from Simmons' every week — enough for a regiment, I'm sure, and at such a price, too, and all because he voted blue"——

"Voting blue, Mrs Rudd," interrupted my Lady, "is nothing at all compared with the

good service you would do me, if you could only oblige my maid in the matter of this letter. Her future happiness, I may say, is bound up in the mere fact of that little note arriving or not at its destination."

"*Mr R. Derrick, Turf Hotel, Piccadilly,*" muttered Mrs Rudd, looking at the address over the top of her silver spectacles. "I should like to have half the Abbey grocery custom very much, of course."

"You shall have it," whispered my Lady in broken tones.

"But I dare not do it," continued the post-mistress. "This might be held over me—if it ever came to be known—so that I should never be my own mistress again, which, now that Rudd is gone, I mean to be. When you have once done an illegal action, my Lady, you may just as well be a

slave—until you have taken your punishment. Somebody is sure to get wind of it, and to put you under their thumb."

My Lady gave a ghastly smile, for speech was not in her.

"Look here, Mrs Rudd," interposed Mistress Forest softly, "you are not asked either to destroy or to give up this letter—of the inside of which, if you please, I will tell you every word. It is written to my lover —that's the fact; and I am very, very anxious that he should receive it"—here she trod upon my Lady's foot with unmistakable emphasis—"should receive it by this night's post."

"Well, so he will," returned the postmistress, "in Piccadilly."

"Yes, but Mr Derrick is *not* in Piccadilly," urged the waiting-maid. "The direction

should be '*Care of Mr Arthur Haldane*'—what court is it, my Lady?—Yes; *Pump Court, Temple.* If you would only let me write *that,* Mrs Rudd, upon the envelope, instead of the present address, all mischief will be avoided. Would it not, my Lady?"

"There seems no great harm in that," said Mrs Rudd reflectively.

"No harm whatever, and a great deal of good to you," murmured the waiting-maid, as with a rapid hand she crossed out the words already written, and substituted for them the address of Mr Haldane's law-chambers. "Thank you kindly. Now, please to stamp this other. I am so much obliged."

"And I too," said my Lady graciously. "Be so kind, Mrs Rudd, as to let me take your list of groceries with me. What nice

macaroni that looks—I find such a difficulty in getting it in the country pure."

Mrs Rudd herself accompanied my Lady to her chariot, and courtesied to the ground as the chariot whirled away.

No sooner were they alone, than mistress and maid exchanged a hearty kiss. "Thank you, thank you, dear Mary," cried the former; "without your presence of mind, what should we have done! I began to feel quite prostrate with despair, and even now I tremble to think how nearly we had failed. I could not go through such a scene again, I believe, even if my life depended upon it."

"Ah, yes, you could, my Lady; and I only trust it may not be necessary for you to do so. There is nothing more, however, to be done at present, save to wait and hope—

except the telegraph message. I ventured to tell John, 'To the Railway Station.'"

"Telegraph to whom, and about what, Mary?"

"We must let Mr Arthur know what he is to do with that letter, my Lady; otherwise, he may endeavour to forward it to the person to whom it is addressed."

"Very true, dear Mary. I do believe that my wits are leaving me. By all means telegraph 'Burn it.' I wish I could repay you for your prudent thought, as easily as I can recompense Mrs Rudd for her complaisance."

"Do not think of repaying me, my dear," replied the waiting-maid fondly. "It is a heartfelt pleasure to find that I am not altogether useless in this strait. I am yours—yours—yours—my beloved mistress,

and will be though every friend on earth should stand afar off, and you were forsaken by your very kith and kin."

"But God forbid that should ever be the case, Mary!" ejaculated Lady Lisgard solemnly.

"*Amen*, my Lady—amen, I'm sure; but when the worst happens that can happen, you will please to remember you have Mary Forest still!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNCHEERFUL PICNIC.

BY the time Lady Lisgard returned to the Abbey, notwithstanding that the sleek bays had devoured the road with all the haste of which their condition permitted, it was long past the breakfast-hour, and her absence from that meal provoked no little comment from the members of her family. Nobody was able to allay their curiosity as to what could have taken mamma to Dalwynch, but Miss Aynton did her best to stimulate it.

"She has gone upon Mary Forest's account," said she—"that is all I can tell you. I never knew any one take such trouble about her maids as dear Lady Lisgard."

"Yes, Rose," replied Letty warmly; "but it is not every maid who has lived with her mistress thirty years. I believe Mary would lay down her very life for dear mamma, and indeed for any of us. Whenever I read those stupid letters in the papers about there being no good old servants to be seen now a days, I long to send the editor a list of our people at the Abbey. Mary, indeed, is quite a new acquisition in comparison with Wiggins and the gardener; but then she is almost faultless. I have heard mamma say that there has never been a word between them."

"Not between them, indeed, Letty," returned Miss Aynton laughing; "for Mistress Forest has all the talk to herself."

Sir Richard smiled grimly, for Mary had been in his bad books ever since her attachment to "that vagabond Derrick."

"Good, Miss Rose!" cried Walter—"very good. I wish I could say as much for this so-called new-laid egg. Why should eggs be of different degrees of freshness? Why not all fresh? Why are they ever permitted to accumulate?"

"My egg is very good," observed Sir Richard sententiously; "how is yours, Miss Aynton?" and he laid an emphasis upon the name, in tacit reproof to his brother for having been so familiar as to say "Miss Rose."

"Well, Sir Richard, I am London-bred,

you know, and therefore your country eggs, by comparison, are excellent."

"I wish I could think," said the baronet with stateliness, "that in other matters we equally gained by contrast with Town, in your opinion."

"I believe London is the place to get everything good," remarked Walter sharply.

"We are going to-day, Miss Aynton," continued the baronet, without noticing the interruption, "to offer you something which really cannot be got in town, and which hitherto the state of the weather has forbidden even here"——

"Ah, for shame, Richard!" interrupted Letty, holding up her hands. "Now, that was to be a surprise for Rose.—It's a picnic, my dear. I daresay now you scarcely know *what* that is."

"I can tell you, then," ejaculated Walter with acidity: "it's packing up all the things you would have in the ordinary course at luncheon in a comfortable manner—except the bread, or something equally necessary, which is always left behind—and carrying them about six miles to the top of an unprotected hill—in this particular case, to a tower without a roof to it—there to be eaten without tables or chairs, and in positions the most likely to produce indigestion that the human body can adapt itself to."

"I have always been told that being in a bad humour is the most certain thing to cause what you eat to disagree with you," observed Letty demurely.—"Never mind what Walter says. I am sure you will be delighted, dear Rose; we are going to Belcomb, a sort of shooting-box belonging to

us, about five miles away, and built by grandpapa."

"Commonly termed 'Lisgard's Folly,'" added Master Walter.

"Not by his descendants, however, I should hope, with one exception," observed Sir Richard haughtily.—"I will thank you, Walter, not to cut my newspaper."

Master Walter had seized the paper-knife as though it had been a more deadly weapon, and was engaged in disembowelling one of a multiplicity of newspapers which had just arrived by post.

"I did not see it was yours," returned he. "Goodness knows, nobody wants to read the *Court Journal* but yourself. The idea of not liking one's newspaper cut!"

"Yes, I must say, my dear Richard," said Letty, playfully patting her elder brother, next

to whom she sat, upon the shoulder, "that is a most singular objection of yours. I think it certainly proves that you will always remain an old bachelor."

Sir Richard maintained a frowning silence. Master Walter twirled his silken moustache, and looked up at Miss Aynton with a meaning smile.

"What is your opinion upon the subject," said he, "Miss Rose?"

"Insolent!" exclaimed Sir Richard, rising so hastily that he knocked over the chair on which he had been sitting. "How dare you ask such questions in my presence?"

"Richard, Richard!" cried a reproving voice; and lo! at the open door stood my Lady, hollow-eyed and pale, and with such a weariness and melancholy in her tones as would have touched most hearts.—"Am I

ever to find you and Walter quarrelling thus? —Yes, I have heard all, and think you both to blame; but nothing can excuse this violence. If I have any authority in this house at all, not another word, I beg."

Sir Richard bit his lip, but resumed his seat; Walter went on quietly dissecting the *Illustrated London News*, with an air of intense interest; Miss Aynton very accurately traced the pattern of her plate with her fork; Letty, the innocent cause of the outbreak, shed silent tears. Altogether, the family picture was gloomy, and the situation embarrassing. My Lady reaped this advantage, however, that nobody asked her a word about her expedition to Dalwynch.

"Do not let me detain you at table, my dear Letty," said she, breaking a solemn

pause. "Miss Aynton was so good as to make my coffee this morning, and therefore it is only fair that she should perform the same kind office now."

Glad enough of this excuse to leave the room—a movement felt by all to be very difficult of imitation—Letty rushed up stairs to indulge in a good cry in her own bedroom, "the upper system of fountains" only having been yet in play. Sir Richard gloomily stalked away towards the stables; Walter lounged into the hall, lit a cigar, and paced to and fro upon the terrace beneath the windows of the breakfast-room, with both his hands in his pockets. Whiffs of his Havana, and scraps of the opera tune which he was humming, came in at the open window, to those who yet remained. My Lady had much too good taste to dislike

the smell of good tobacco, and the air which he had chosen was a favourite one with her; perhaps Master Walter hummed it upon that account. He was to leave the Abbey next day to join his regiment—although not immediately. It was only natural he should wish to spend a few days in London after he had had so much of the quiet of Mirk, and yet my Lady grudged them. How pleasant everything about him was; how dull the Abbey would be without him; what a sad pity it was that he and Sir Richard got on so ill. If she were to die, would they not turn their backs on one another for ever, and be brothers no more; and if something worse than Death were to happen to her—— No, she would not think of that. Had not all that could be done to avert such utter ruin been done that very

morning? There was surely no immediate peril now—no necessity for such excessive caution and self-restraint as she had been obliged of late months to exercise; it was something to have breathing-space and liberty.

"I hope you are coming with us to the picnic, Lady Lisgard, now that that horrid man has gone?" said a cold quiet voice.

My Lady, looking out of window at her favourite son, and lost in gloomy depths of thought, had entirely forgotten that she had invited Miss Rose Aynton to bear her company. She did not venture to look upon her questioner's face, though she felt that it was fixed on hers, reading Heaven knew what. How had she dared to think of liberty with this domestic spy under her very roof! What should she answer to this

dreadful question? Something this girl must know, or must suspect, or she would never have ventured thus to allude a second time to the man Derrick, after her rebuff in the morning. Above all things, she would follow Mistress Forest's advice, and get Miss Aynton out of Mirk Abbey. She had intended to speak to her respecting what had just occurred at the breakfast-table; that would also offer an opportunity to say something more.

"Yes, Rose, I am going with you to Belcomb. It is a very favourite spot of mine —very. It was about that expedition, partly, that I wished to speak with you. I was about to ask you to be very careful in your conduct towards my sons this day. It is the last time they will be together for weeks, perhaps. Be kind to my poor Richard.

Of course, Walter knew nothing of what has passed between you and his brother; but the bow which he drew at a venture sent home a barbed shot."

Miss Aynton bowed her head.

"You were sorry for that, Rose, I know. You cannot fail to see how irritable he has lately grown, poor fellow. The fact is, he has overestimated the strength of his own powers of self-constraint. Your presence is a perpetual trial to him." My Lady paused, anticipating some reply to a hint so palpable; but Miss Aynton, who carried her fancy-work in her pocket, continued to develop a pansy in floss silk; and the flower opened in silence.

"Under these circumstances, dear Rose," pursued my Lady, "do you not think it would be better—I know how embarrassing

it would be to you to propose it, and therefore, although your hostess, I relieve you of the task—do you not think it would, on the whole, be wiser for you to leave us a little sooner than you had intended?"

The humming of the opera tune, and the odour of the Havana, were growing more distinct, and the elastic footfall on the gravel was coming very near.

"If I consulted my own feelings," returned Miss Aynton, in firm, clear tones, "I should certainly have left Mirk before this, Lady Lisgard."

"Hush, Miss Aynton, for Heaven's sake!" cried my Lady, "the window is open."

"But unless Sir Richard himself," pursued the girl in more subdued accents, "releases me from my promise to remain until after his birthday, I must, with your permission,

madam, do so; otherwise, he might possibly imagine that *his* presence is too great a trial for *me,* and I should be loath indeed to have my departure so misconstrued."

There was bitterness in the tone with which she spoke, but determination too.

"I am to understand, then," returned my Lady flushing, "that contrary to my advice and wish"——

"Mother, dear, here comes the Break," cried Master Walter, from the terrace beneath, in his ringing cheerful tones. "I hope you have told Roberts about the prog."

"Yes, dear, yes," answered my Lady, lovingly even in her haste; then turning to the young girl, she whispered almost fiercely: "At least, Miss Aynton, you will shape your behaviour this afternoon as I requested. There is no time now to discuss the other matter."

And indeed the butler entered the next moment with: "The Break is at the door, my Lady."

Now, the Break was a very roomy vehicle, with accommodation within it for three times the party who were now about to occupy it, beside two seats at the back, like flying buttresses, for footmen. Yet Sir Richard chose to sit upon the box beside the driver, a place only selected (unless for smoking purposes) by persons with "horsey" characteristics, who prefer coachman's talk to that of their equals, and among whom the baronet could not be justly classed; but the fact was, the young man was in an evil temper, and desired no companionship but his own. He would have seen the whole expedition at the bottom of the sea—a metaphor open to the gravest objections, but which he used while arguing

the matter with himself aloud—if it were not that that fellow Walter was going—and—and—he was not going to let *him* have all the talk to himself, that was all. True, Sir Richard had given up the idea of transforming Miss Aynton into Lady Lisgard; but still it was not pleasant to see another man making himself exclusively agreeable to her. He was annoyed with himself at having exhibited such passion at the breakfast-table, for the more he thought of it, the more he felt convinced that Walter's remark, although doubtless intended to be offensive, had not been made with any knowledge of his own rejected suit. Still, he was in a very bad temper, and listened to the conversation going on behind his back with a moody brow, and every now and then a parting of the lips, through which escaped something the reverse of a prayer.

It was Walter, of course, who was talking.

"Inhabited!" said he in answer to some question of Miss Aynton's; "O dear, no. Belcomb never had a tenant but once, and I should think would never have another. One Sir Heron Grant and his brother took it two years for the shooting-season: a brace of Scotchmen whose ancestors dated from the Deluge, but so dreary a couple, that one wished that the family had started from a still earlier epoch, and been all washed away."

"I thought Richard rather liked Sir Heron," observed Letty simply.

"Yes, because he was a baronet; and birds of the same gorgeous plumage flock together, you know. There was nothing remarkable about him but his feathers, and he scarcely ever opened his mouth except

to put food in it. It is said that in the old stage-coach times, he and his brother travelled from Edinburgh to London, and only uttered one sentence apiece. At York, the younger brother saw a rat come out of a wheat-rick. 'By Jove,' cried he, 'there's a rat!' The next morning, and after an interval of about eighty miles, Sir Heron replied: 'Ay, if Towser had seen that rat, he would have made short work of him.'"

"Well, it appears, they agreed, at all events," returned Rose coldly. "After all, even a foolish remark is better than an ill-natured one."

"The scenery is getting well worth your attention here," observed Sir Richard, turning graciously round towards Miss Aynton. "Belcomb is a complete solitude, but for

those who are contented with the pleasures of the country, it is a pleasant spot enough."

"Can we see the house from here, Sir Richard?"

"No, not until we reach this Windmill, on the top of the hill. The private road branches out from the highway at that spot; and the mill is the nearest inhabited house to Belcomb.—By the by, mother, Hathaway must be spoken to about those sails of his—there, you saw how even old Jenny started at them—it is positively dangerous for horses to pass by. He must build up that old wall a foot higher, and put a gate up. Any stray cattle might wander in and get knocked down—the sails are so close to the ground."

Master Walter had not at all relished

Miss Aynton's rejoinder to his story; still less had he liked his brother's striking into the conversation; least of all did he approve of this landlord talk about repairs and alterations, which reminded him of his being a younger son, and having neither part nor lot in the great Lisgard heritage.

"There's the Folly," cried he suddenly, with a view of changing the subject; "upon that cliff-like hill yonder, above that belt of trees."

"What, that beautiful ivied tower!" exclaimed Rose.

"Yes; without a roof to it."

"Well, at all events, it's very pretty," said Miss Aynton reprovingly. "I am sure, Mr Walter, you ought to be grateful to your grandpapa for building so picturesque an edifice."

"He might have made a road, however, to it," observed Walter satirically; "a road and a roof, I do consider to be indispensable."

"There's a beautiful winding path through the wood, Rose," said Letty, "fifty times better than any road; and is not the piece of water charming? It is the only one with any pretension to be called a Lake in all the county."

Certainly Belcomb deserved praise. A small but comfortably furnished house, embosomed in trees, through which were the pleasantest peeps of hill and dale, and spread before it quite a crystal tarn, with rocky islands so picturesquely grouped that they almost gave the notion of being artificial. It was as though a segment of the Lake-country had been cut off, and inserted into the very midst of Wheatshire.

It was as lonely, too, to all appearance, as any Cumberland mere. An old man and his wife, who were in charge of the place, came hirpling out with respectful welcomes, and the latter was about to remove the shutters of the drawing-room, when my Lady interposed.

"No, Rachel; we will not trouble you to do that. We are going to picnic at the Tower. You seem quite surprised to see us so early. I suppose nobody has been here yet upon the same errand."

"Well, no, ma'am; nor is it likely, after your orders"——

"Oh, the fact is, mother," interrupted Sir Richard with a little stammer, "I forgot to tell you about it; but Rinkel informs me there has been considerable damage done by parties coming here from Dalwynch and other

places, and therefore he has put up a Notice to prohibit the whole thing in future."

And, indeed, upon the path leading to "the Folly," which could be approached by another way than that in front of the house, they presently came upon a board recently erected, which threatened Trespassers with all the rigour of the law.

There was a bitter sneer upon Captain Lisgard's handsome face, at this assumption of authority upon the part of his brother, and it did not soften when my Lady thoughtfully remarked: "Ah, well; that will certainly make the place very private."

A curious reply, as Letty thought, at the time, for her mother to make, who was always so eager to oblige her neighbours, and who well knew how popular Lisgard's Folly was with the humbler class of townsfolk in the

summer months. But she was destined to be vastly more astonished before that day was spent.

The little party, so strangely out of accord with one another, took their lunch, indeed, beneath the shadow of the Tower; but all those harmonious elements which are so absolutely essential to the success of a picnic were wanting. There were no high spirits, no good-humoured badinage, and not the ghost of a laugh. My Lady, singularly silent even for her, gazed around her on the familiar landscape, or regarded the shuttered cottage with a mournful interest, as though they reminded her of happier times. Miss Aynton, careful of what my Lady had enjoined, was studiously urbane to Sir Richard, but without obtaining the wished-for result; for while the baronet was

thereby only rendered tolerably gracious, the captain grew intensely irritated. Poor Letty, who was the only one prepared to be agreeable, or had any expectation of enjoying herself, felt immensely relieved when the repast was concluded, and the horses were ordered to be "put to." As for strolling about the grounds, and pointing out their varied beauties to Rose, as she had counted upon doing, that was no longer to be thought of. Sir Richard, as usual, offered his arm in stately fashion to his mother; but Master Walter, lighting a cigar, stood for a few minutes looking down with knitted brow upon the lake, then sauntered after them, without saying a word, and with both hands in his pockets.

"Dear Rose," cried Letty, who watched these proceedings with little short of terror,

"what have you said to make Walter so cross? I never saw him behave like that in my life. He did not even look at you. Would it be very wrong if you just ran after him, and said a word or two before we got into the carriage? I am so dreadfully afraid of a quarrel between him and Richard."

"Just as you please, Letty," returned Miss Aynton, looking pale, and a little frightened too; and forcing a laugh, she tripped down the zigzag path in pursuit of the exasperated captain.

Letty waited a reasonable time, watching the footman collect the débris of the entertainment, and pack the plate, and then, supposing their difficulty had been adjusted, followed upon the track of her friend and Walter. The path was not only of consider-

able length, but so very steep, that one little zigzag overhung another; thus, as she descended, she perceived through the thin Spring foliage the two young people standing beneath her, although they were quite unconscious of her approach. She caught the last words of something Rose was saying; those were: "Walter, dear." She marked the girl stretch her arms towards him, as though she would have clasped them round his neck; and then she saw Captain Lisgard, of her Majesty's Light Dragoons, put her roughly by, shake himself free of her with a movement expressive almost of loathing, and turn upon his heels with an oath.

CHAPTER V.

THE FINESSE IN TRUMPS.

IT is the Night before the Derby. The West End is thronged with men. The streets are perceptibly more thronged with well-dressed males than at any other time in the year. The May meetings brought enough of parsons and sober-coated laity to dull the living tide—to almost make us Londoners a mournful people (which we are, naturally, *not*, despite what Frenchmen say); but those grave ones have either departed from us, or are now lost and undistinguishable

in this influx of gay company. All the new-comers are in their most gorgeous raiment, for is not this the great "gaudy" week of the Wicked? Half the officers of cavalry in her Majesty's service have obtained leave of absence for eight-and-forty hours upon urgent private affairs; and a fourth of the infantry have done the like; they have come up from every station within the four seas to see the great race run, which is to put in their pockets from five pounds to fifty thousand. Over their little books they shake their shining heads, and stroke their tawny moustaches in a deprecating manner, but each one has a secret expectation that "he shall pull it off this once;" for, upon the whole, our military friends have not been fortunate in turf transactions. There is a fair sprinkling, too, of respectable country

gentlemen, who rarely leave their families to occupy their old-bachelor quarters at *Long's* or the *Tavistock*, except on this supreme occasion. Every fast university-man who can obtain an *exeat* upon any pretence whatever—from sudden mortality in the domestic circle down to being *subpœnaed* by a friendly attorney in the supposititious case of Hookey (a blind man) *v.* Walker—is up in town resplendent, confident, Young. Every sporting farmer, save those in the north, who have a private saturnalia of their own in the mid-autumn, has left his farm for two nights and a day, and is seeing life in London. Besides these, an innumerable host of well-dressed scoundrels—for whom the word "Welcher" is altogether too commendable—have come up from country quarters, where they have been playing various "little

games," all more or less discreditable, to work together for evil with their metropolitan *confrères* for four days.

Every haunt of dissipation is holding highest holiday. The stupid, obscene Cider Cellars find, for one night at least, that they have attractions still; the music-halls are tropical with heat and rankest human vegetation; Cremorne, after the crowded theatres have disgorged their steaming crowds, is like a fair. The strangers' room at all the clubs has been bespoken this night for weeks. In the card-rooms, the smoking-rooms, the billiard-rooms, there is scarcely space to move, far less to breathe in; yet there is everywhere a babblement of tongues, and the words that are most bandied about from feverish mouth to mouth, are first, *The King*, and secondly, *Menelaus*. The

tout had kept his word—either from fear or nicest honour—until the stipulated week had elapsed, and then the news of the trial-race began to circulate: from his outsiders' place, to that of fourth favourite, then of third, and at last to that of second had "the French horse" gradually risen. A curious and illogical position enough—but then the turf-people *are* illogical—for if the news that he had beaten *The King* was true, he ought to have been first favourite; and if the news was *not* true, he had no reason to find favour at all. As it was, however, *The King* had come down half a point as if to meet him, to 9 to 2; while *Menelaus* stood at 5 to 1.

And Had that trial-race really taken place or not? and if so, Was it on the Square? was the question which was just then

agitating the Houses of Lords and Commons (nay, it was whispered, Marlborough House itself), and all the mess-tables in her Majesty's service, more than any other subject in this world. There was also a vague rumour that the favourite's "understandings" were not as they should be; that there was a contraction that might be fatal to his prospects; that the idol's feet were of clay. Ralph Derrick had "put the pot on" his *Many Laws*, and would be a millionaire if he won; but Walter Lisgard had put more than the pot. If the French colours did not shew in front at the winning-post, the captain, still to use the elegant metaphor of the sporting fraternity, would be in Queer Street. So infatuated had the young man grown, that he had absolutely hedged even that one bet which insured him

a thousand pounds in case *The King* should win the race. Notwithstanding his coyness in accepting the first offer of a loan from his uncultivated friend, he had borrowed of him twice since, in each case giving his I.O.U., whereby he endeavoured to persuade himself that he was liquidating all obligation; yet, unless he considered his mere autograph was worth the sums for which it was pledged, I know not how he succeeded in this. For if *Menelaus* did not happen to win, he not only would not have enough to discharge his debts of honour for nearly two years—when he would come into possession of his patrimony of five thousand pounds—but even a great portion of *that* would be bespoken. Thus, of course, he had placed himself, through mere greed, in a most unpleasant position; but at the same time

it must be allowed that he had yielded to a great temptation, such as would probably have made the mouth of any financier water, had the opportunity offered in his particular line; for with the exception of mere outsiders, *The King* had beaten every horse that was to contend with him on the morrow; and *Menelaus*, to Walter's certain knowledge, had beaten *The King*.

Equinely speaking, then, it was a certainty that the French horse should win the Derby, in which case the young man's gains would be prodigious; for not only had he taken advantage of the original position of the animal in the betting, but as the odds grew less and less, had still backed him, until his possible winnings reached, on paper, to five figures; on the other hand, by this last piece of imprudence, his possible—— But no, it

was *not* possible. "Things surely wouldn't go so devilish cross with a fellow as that;" or to put the captain's thought in other words, the Government of the Universe being founded upon just principles, would never permit such a stupendous misfortune to overwhelm him; or, it might be, the gallant captain believed that Fortune was indeed a female, and would therefore hesitate to inflict calamity upon so pretty a fellow as himself. At the same time, the event of the morrow was so big with fate, that it was not pleasant to dwell upon it; and anything which could have prevented his mind from recurring to the same, would have been welcomed gladly. But there was but one thing that had the power to do this. His anxiety was far too deep to be flattered away by the smile of Beauty, or lost in the

sparkle of Wine. The homœopathic treatment, *similia similibus*, he felt was the only one that could now give him relief, and he therefore sought for rest from the cares of the race-course in the excitement of the gaming-table. Do not, however, let it be supposed that the captain sought out any of those convenient establishments for the immediate transfer of property, which are guarded by iron doors, and always liable to the incursions of the police, who, upon breaking in, discover four-and-twenty gentlemen (one of whom has swallowed the dice), sitting round a green baize table in conversation about Music and the Fine Arts. Master Walter was rash in his speculations, but he was not madman enough to play chicken-hazard against foxes.

"I think I shall try my luck with the *Landrails* to-night," observed he to his

companion Derrick, stopping short in flaring Piccadilly, and biting his nails. The two men had been occupying lodgings in the same house, the *Turf Hotel* being full; the younger finding a species of comfort in the society of the part-owner of *Menelaus*, who was even more confident of the success of that noble quadruped than himself.

"By all means, my lad," returned the gold-finder simply, "although I don't know what they are; and so as you take me with you, I don't care."

Three weeks ago, such a proposition would have staggered the captain, or rather, he would have rejected it point-blank. To be seen in public with his uncouth and flashily-attired friend, was at that time a considerable trial to the fastidious light dragoon; but the immense interest which they had in

common, had rendered the familiarity of the once odious Orson at first tolerable, and eventually welcome, and even necessary. He had taken him with him into quite exclusive circles, and, except on one occasion at *the Rag*, where Derrick, having drunk more champagne than was good for him, had offered to fight Major Pompus of the Fusiliers *for what he liked*, nothing unpleasant had taken place in consequence. Men observed: "What a deuced rum fellow Lisgard brought with him the other night;" but the said stranger had lost his money very good-naturedly at the whist-table, and it was understood that he had more to lose. Under such circumstances, the gentlemen-players were very charitable. Mr Ralph Derrick did not play a first-rate game at whist; very few persons who have not been

brought up in good society do; but his performance was not so inferior as to make success impossible for a night or two, however certain the ruin that would have overtaken him in the long-run. Moreover, he was never "put off his head" by the largeness of the stake, his habitual lavishness in money-matters rendering him indifferent to that matter. Captain Lisgard, on the other hand, though an excellent player, considering his tender years, was liable to have his nerves disorganised at any crisis of a rubber upon which an unusual amount depended.

"Yes," repeated Master Walter, "I'll try my luck at the *Landrails*, and you shall come, too, Ralph. Any member has a right to introduce whom he likes."

"Even a miner from Cariboo—eh, Master

Walter, provided he's got money in his pocket? Well, I'm their man, whether it's for whist or all-fours."

"All-*fours!*" repeated the captain with irritation. "Who ever heard of a gentleman playing at that game? Do, pray, be particular in what you say to-night. Whatever you do, call a knave a knave, and not a *Jack*. The *Landrails* is a very select place, Ralph, where men who like to play their whist more quietly than at *the Rag* look in for an hour or two rather late."

"Heavier stakes, I suppose?" observed Derrick bluntly.

"Yes, rather. You see, there's always some row with the committee, if play gets beyond a certain height at the regular clubs. Now, this is a sort of friendly circle where the points are quite optional, and the bets too.

Yes, I think I shall try my luck for a pony or two."

"I don't think you look quite fit for whist, my lad, to-night," returned Derrick, gazing gravely into the young man's haggard face. "To-morrow will be a trying day, remember; I think you had much better get to bed."

"I couldn't do it, man!" replied Walter vehemently—"I dare not. I should never sleep a wink, and perhaps go mad with thinking before the morning. Look here, how my hand trembles. I have not nerves of iron, like you."

"Poor lad, poor lad!" ejaculated the other with affectionate compassion. "Nothing, as you say, ever makes me tremble—except D. T. Ah, Heaven, but that is terrible! Never drink, lad, never drink;" and some-

thing like a shudder throbbed through the speaker's brawny frame.

"The *Landrails* meet here," said Walter, stopping at the door of a private house in the neighbourhood of St James's Palace; "it is past eleven, and I daresay play has begun."

"Who owns this house?" asked Derrick carelessly, surveying the unpretending tenement in question—"or rather, who pays the rent?"

"Well, I hope *we* shall, Ralph, this evening. The fact is, the hire of the rooms, the attendance, and even the cost of the refreshments, are all defrayed each night by the winners in proportion to their gains. Money does not change hands until the ensuing week, but the secretary enters all accounts in his ledger, and sees that they are duly

squared. I am answerable for your liabilities to-night, so do you be careful with the liquors."

As the youthful Mentor administered this wholesome piece of advice to his senior, the door opened, and they were admitted. It was a most respectable house, neither very large nor very small, and neatly but inexpensively furnished. The butler was a man who might have been the body-servant of an evangelical bishop, and whose conscience was troubled by the spiritual shortcomings of his right reverend master. To come upon so grave and sad a man upon the eve of the Derby Day, was quite a homily in itself. Through the open door of the dining-room could be seen a cold collation, at which men dropped in from above-stairs if they felt so disposed; but there were light refreshments in the

drawing-room also, and a great variety of pleasant drinks. The *Landrails* were thirsty folks, and imbibed gallons of iced hock and Seltzer water; but they had not, as a rule, good appetites. There were three tables for whist, and one dedicated to piquet or écarté. All these had massive candlesticks screwed into their wood-work—perhaps only to prevent their falling off; but it also put a stop to any possible use of them as a weapon or missile, and I think that contingency had been also taken into account. A candlestick comes uncommonly handy to the fingers when luck has gone pertinaciously against one, and the man who has won all the money is personally hateful. Above all things, it was important, in that quiet, frendly circle, to repress all ebullition of temper, and to steer clear of all disputes. Nobody, one

would hope, who was in a position to be admitted to that society, would stoop to cheating; but a little strap was inserted at the opposite corners of each table for the convenience of marking the score, wherein, when the counters were once placed, they could not be accidentally removed by the elbow.*

The spacious room—for it was a double drawing-room—was by no means brilliantly lit up; a couple of bare wax-candles stood upon the refreshment-table, where, by the by, there was no attendant, each man helping himself at pleasure; but the other four pair in the room had shades over them, which

* Persons who are acquainted with the game of whist have informed me, that it is sometimes better—in the case of holding two by honours, for instance—to be at three than four.

dulled their radiance, although it caused them to throw a very bright light upon the tables themselves. When the new-comers entered, which they did quite unannounced, the sight struck one of them at least as a very strange one: three shining isles of light —for one whist-table was not in use— amid a sea of gloom; ten thoughtful faces with a sort of halo round them, and one or two sombre ones standing by like their evil genii, and watching the play. There was not a sound to be heard at first, except the dull fall of the pieces of pasteboard, but presently a hand being finished in their neighbourhood, a sort of hushed talk began about what would have happened if somebody had under-played the diamond.

"What are the points?" whispered Derrick in his companion's ear.

"What are the points to-night, Beamish?" inquired Walter of one of the four, a very unimpassioned-looking young man, who replied with a most unpleasant and ghastly smile —as though he had cut his throat a little too high up: "Fives and fifties, my gallant captain, with the odds in ponies; so, being a younger son, I advise you to go to some other table."

"Never mind, I am going to make a good marriage," returned Walter coolly. Mr Beamish had been a penniless government clerk until he wedded the widow of an opulent builder with half a town for her jointure. "If you are not full," added the captain, "I declare in here, for myself and friend."

All four looked up for an instant at the threatened stranger; for your good player, intent on gain, detests the introduction of an

unknown hand. Somehow or other, although the odds are two to one, "it's always his cursed luck to have him for a partner." General Prim, who had been a martinet in the Peninsula, and as offensive to his fellow-creatures as less favourable circumstances had permitted ever since, gave a ferocious grin, and shook his single scalp-lock of gray hair like a malignant pantaloon. The Hon. Pink Hawthorne, attaché at the court at Christiana, but absent from that lively capital upon sick-leave, wrenched his fair moustache this way and that, and frowned as gloomily as his foolish forehead would permit. The dealer, a Mr Roberts, an ancient bencher of one of the Inns of Court, paused with the trump card in his fingers still unturned. "Does your friend know what the Blue Peter means, Lisgard?"

"I've been a sailor half my life, sir, and it's devilish odd if I did *not*," returned Ralph Derrick grimly.

"What the devil did the fellow mean?" added he to Walter as the game began, and all the four became at once automatons.

"It's the new system of asking for trumps," answered Walter peevishly. "The same thing that they called the Pilot the other night. How ridiculous you have made yourself. See, there's another table up. Bless the man, not there, that's the piquet place."

Ralph had quietly seated himself next to Major Piccalilli, of the Irregular Cavalry, Cayenne Station, Upper India, and had already disturbed his marking-cards, whereby that gallant officer was reduced to the verge of apoplexy with speechless rage.

"Stay, you shall stick to this one," continued Walter in a low voice; "that fellow Beamish is hateful to me—and I will cut in yonder. There is not a muff-table in the room — all these beggars play too well." With these words, the captain hurried away; and as soon as the rubber he had been watching was finished, Derrick was admitted of the conclave, to the exclusion of General Prim, who cursed that circumstance very audibly, and for a man of his advanced years, with considerable emphasis and vigour. Derrick fell as a partner to the lot of the gentleman who had inquired as to his proficiency in the art of asking for trumps.

"If you would only hold your cards a *little* more on the table, I should be able to see them myself," remarked Mr Roberts with severity.

"If they look over my hands, sir," returned Derrick reassuringly, "I'll forgive 'em: that's all.—If you won't take that old gentleman's bets"—referring to the general, who seemed extremely anxious to back their adversaries —"then I will;" and he did it—and luck went with him. There was nothing stronger than champagne to be got at in that respectable place of business, so Ralph kept his head, and won—a hundred and fifty pounds or so. Then, the table breaking up, he rose and stood over his young friend, to see how the cards were going with him.

"Bad," muttered Derrick to himself, as he watched Walter running through his hand with eager haste, as a woman flirts her fan. His beautiful face was dark with care, his eyes flashed impatiently upon the man whose turn it was to lead.

"Our odds are in fifties, eh, Lisgard?" drawled his right-hand adversary, Captain and Lieutenant Wobegon of the Horse Guards' azure.

"The same as before, I suppose," returned the young man haughtily.

Ralph gave a prolonged whistle. His young friend had a treble up, and the others nothing, so that he must be betting two hundred and fifty pounds to one hundred; and "the same as before" too! Within the next minute, the cards were thrown down upon the table, and the adversaries scored a treble likewise. "That's been my cursed luck, Ralph, all to-night!" cried the young man with a little grating laugh. "Four by honours against one every deal."

"You must have been doing something devilish bad, Lisgard," observed the Guardsman.

"Yes, I have—playing!" answered Walter bitterly. "But no fellow *can* play with sixes and sevens; it demoralises one so."

"All cards do, my grandmother says," answered Wobegon, who for a Guardsman was not without humour. "She made me promise, when she paid my debts, my first Derby, that I would never back anything again; and I never have, except my luck and bills."

Captain Lisgard had naturally a keen appreciation of fun, but he did not vouchsafe a smile to the facetious Guardsman, who himself joked like an undertaker, and had never been known to laugh in his life. The fact was, that nothing could just now commend itself to Master Walter except winning back his money.

Reader, did you ever play for more than

you can afford? Pardon me the inquiry; there is no occasion to be Pharisaical; for it is even possible to do worse things than that in your line: moreover, the question of what is more than you can afford is such a large one, and affords such opportunities for a nimble conscience to escape. I remember in Lord Houghton's *Life of Keats*, that that gallant nobleman, in defending the poet from the charge of dissipation and gambling, remarks that it all arose from his having lost ten pounds upon a certain evening at cards. Now, considering that the author of *Hyperion* had no income, nor any bank except his Imagination to apply to—and it was notorious that he could never put a cheque even upon *that*—I take his Lordship to be a very charitable peer. Ten pounds must have been, for Keats, a large sum.

But, undoubtedly, the matter is one for a man to decide for himself; the whole question is relative; and if you are apt to lose your temper, then remember you play for more than you can afford, although your stakes are but—penny-stamps. Captain Walter Lisgard had lost his temper and his money also. There was a numbed sense of misfortune pervading him; it seemed to him as though he was Predestinated to lose. I am much mistaken if he had not a sort of humming in his ears. One of the most religious men whom it has been my fortune to meet, has informed me that, in his unregenerate days, when he was a gambler and everything else,* he once *prayed to win* at cards.

* "Every sin, sir, in the Decalogue, I am glad to say, have I committed"—meaning that the present change in him was rendered thereby all the more satisfactory—"with the sole exception of murder."

"Then it strikes me," said I, "in addition to your other backslidings at the time you speak of, you were just a trifle blasphemous."

"No, sir," said he; "I think not. All that I possessed in the world was depending upon the result of a certain game at écarté. If I had lost it, I should have been a beggar. If I won it, I resolutely resolved never to touch a card again—never to run the risk of experiencing a second time the mental agony I was then undergoing. I am not ashamed to confess, sir, that in such a strait I prayed to win; and I *did* win."

"All I have to say, sir," replied I, "is this: that it was uncommonly hard upon the other man."

Good resolutions are indeed by no means uncommon among tolerably young persons

in positions of pecuniary peril, such as that of Captain Lisgard. They vow their candles to this and that patron saint if they should but escape shipwreck upon the green baize this once. Master Walter's bid was confined to a few "dips," if one may use so humble a metaphor, of which about fifty went to the pound, and even those were not offered in a penitent spirit. He would never play whist with the *Landrails* any more. He would never lay the long odds beyond "couters"—a foolish word he and his set used for sovereigns. He would never back himself at all when playing with "that fool Pompus"—his present partner. He would become, in short, exceedingly wise and prudent, if he should only "pull off" this present rubber. There was "life in the Mussel" yet. They were at "three all"

when Pompus led his knave instead of his ten, from ten, knave, king, and only got the trick when he should have got the game.

"We shall never have another chance now," sighed Walter, as his left-hand adversary turned up the queen. But privately he thought that fortune would not be quite so cruel as all that came to; moreover, he had an excellent hand. His fingers trembled as he arranged the long suit of clubs, headed by tierce major, and saw that he had four trumps to bring them in with.

As the game went on, however, Pompus exhibited his usual feebleness, and things began to look very black indeed. In the third round of trumps, Master Walter's memory left him sudden as an extinguished

taper. It is sad to have to say it of so excellent a player, but he recollected nothing whatever, except that, if he lost that rubber, it would be an addition of three hundred pounds to the sum he already owed Captain Wobegon. It was his turn to play, and he was third hand. He had the king and ten of trumps. The ace had been played; ay, he remembered that after a struggle, and the knave too. Yes, his left-hand adversary had played the knave. Should he finesse his ten or not? That was the question, upon the decision of which depended some five hundred pounds. Whist is not always a game of pleasure. Master Walter finessed the ten. "Thousand devils!" cried Derrick with a tremendous imprecation, "why, the queen was *turned up* on your left, lad: you have thrown away the game." And it was so. Walter

Lisgard did not speak a word; but having compared his note-book with that of Captain Wobegon, retired into a little office out of the back drawing-room, where the secretary of the *Landrails* entered the members' somewhat complicated little accounts with one another in a very business-like-looking ledger. "You have had a bad night of it for *you*, sir," remarked this gentleman quietly; "you generally hold your own."

"Yes. What is the cursed total?"

"Eighteen hundred."

"Ralph Derrick," said Walter Lisgard, as the two walked up St James's Street towards their lodgings for bath and breakfasts, but scarcely for bed, since the morning was already far advanced—"if any horse but *Menelaus* wins the race, I am a ruined man."

CHAPTER VI.

MR WITHERS WITHDRAWS HIMSELF.

WHEN Derrick and the captain met at the breakfast-table upon that Derby morning, there was a note for the latter waiting by his plate. It had been brought over from the *Turf Hotel* with apologies, having been detained there by mistake, "through everybody being so busy," for at least a week. As he turned it moodily over without opening it, Ralph saw that it had the Mirk postmark.

"You have a letter from home, I see, lad; lucky dog!"

"Yes, very lucky," replied the young man cynically, as he ran his eye over the contents; "worse than my infernal luck of last night, and only less than the misfortune I am looking for to-day is the news in this letter."

"How is that, lad?"

"Well, you will hear some day."—Here he took the note, and slowly tore it lengthways into thin strips, and then across, so that it lay in a hundred fragments. — "But it's a secret, at least it was until a week ago, but being in a woman's hands, of course she let it slip;" and Master Walter looked as near to "ugly" as it was possible for his handsome face to go.

"I fancied your folks at home were unaware of your having intended to be at the *Turf Hotel*, and rather thought

you were with your regiment, like a good boy."

The captain returned no answer; but Derrick, who was in excellent spirits notwithstanding the anxieties of the coming day, continued to address him in that healthy and cheerful strain which is the most intolerable of all manners to one who is melancholy, and what is worse, in dread suspense. "Now, for my part, Walter, any letter in a woman's hand, as I think yours is—nay, you foolish lad, if you hadn't stuffed it into your breast-pocket so quickly, I protest I should have thought it had come from your mother or your sister. Why, you don't mean to say that that pretty little gate-keeper down at Mirk writes letters to handsome Master Walter?"

"And why not?" asked the captain

defiantly. "If it had come from Mistress Forest, then, indeed, you might have taken upon yourself to object, although I understand that even there you have not yet obtained the position of bridegroom-elect."

"No," returned Derrick drily. "I was about to say that *I* should have welcomed any letter in a woman's hand, especially if it began: 'My dearest'"——

"What the devil do you mean by looking over my letter?" exclaimed Master Walter, starting up in a fury.

"Nothing," answered the other, purple with laughter and muffin; "I never dreamed of such a thing. But since you said it came from the gate-keeper's daughter, I thought I'd make a shot. The idea of my wanting to read all the pretty things the little fool writes to a wicked young dog like you;

it's no fun to me to watch a moth at a candle. But what a spoiled lad it is! Why, here I have had no letter at all from Mirk, and yet I am content. Silence gives consent, they say; and particularly in this case, when I know nothing but your lady-mother prevents Mary writing 'My dearest Ralph' to me. Indeed, if she wrote 'Dear sir, I can have no more to do with you,' it would not have the smallest effect. What I have made up my mind to do, generally comes to pass. Where there's a *will*—that is, supposing it is strong enough—there is most times a *way*."

"I know you're a devil of a fellow," sneered Master Walter, rising and gazing out of window at the bustling street already astir with the Derby vehicles; "but I am afraid your *will* can't win me this race."

"It's done a great deal towards it, Captain Lisgard. It brought about the trial-race with the 'crack,' although my Lord did give himself such cursed airs, and not only let you in for a good thing, but lent you the money to take advantage of it to the uttermost."

"That's true," said Walter frankly, and holding out his thin white hand. "I daresay you think me an ungrateful beast, but I'm worried by a matter that you know nothing of; besides"——

"Not another word, lad—not another word; I am a rude rough creature, and I said some unpleasant things myself.—Here is our Hansom, and with light-green curtains of gauze. I'm cursed if I go down to Epsom with the colours of *The King* on my cab. Why, the beggar must have done it to insult us."

"Stuff and nonsense, Ralph; it's only to

keep off the dust. If you have no curtains, you must wear a veil, that's all. Look there, in yonder barouche-and-four, every man has a green veil on. By Heaven! that Wobegon's one of 'em. He's got my I.O.U. for fifteen hundred pounds in his waistcoat-pocket; and there's that ugly devil Beamish, too.—Well," muttered the captain to himself, "I'm glad I did'nt go with *that* party, at all events."

Master Walter, who was as popular in town as elsewhere, had been asked to take a seat for that day in half-a-dozen "drags" and barouches, but he had preferred to go alone with Derrick; not that he enjoyed his companionship, but because, as I have before said, he gathered some comfort from his society under the present cloud of anxiety and apprehension.

"I say, Walter, you are a pretty fellow; you forgot all about the provisions, but see here!" cried Derrick triumphantly, pulling a hamper from under the sofa; "a pigeon-pie, a fowl, two bottles of champagne, and one of brandy!"

"What confounded nonsense!" returned the young man peevishly. "There are dozens of parties who would have given us lunch. The idea of a hamper on the top of a Hansom!"

"Well, come, you are wrong anyway, *there*, lad, for I have seen a dozen going by this morning."

"Very likely, and you have also seen plenty of vans, each with a barrel of ale. However, it's of no consequence. If the Frenchman wins, I could eat periwinkles out of a hand-barrow with a hair-pin; and if he

loses—why, then, I shall not have much appetite."

"Look here, lad," replied Derrick gravely, "this sort of thing won't do. Never be down on your luck, until, at all events, your luck is down upon you. You are not cut out for this work, *I* can see. A man ought to be sanguine, yet cool; hopeful of gain—yet quite prepared for loss, who goes in for such a stake as you have got upon to-day's race. A gambler should be all brain, and no heart: let me suggest, before we start, that you should just take a little brandy."

"No, no!" ejaculated the captain impatiently. "If I am a funk, as you so delicately hint, I am not a fool. Come, let's be off. The next time I see this room again, I shall be a made man—or a beggar."

To any man, who risks by betting more

than he can conveniently spare, the going to the Derby is by no means a cheerful expedition, whatever his coming home may chance to be; and further, it may be observed, that of all professional persons, those who take up the Turf as their line in life, are the most sombre and unlively. Many of them are clever fellows enough, and one or two are honest men, but there is no such thing as fun among them. The Ring would never take to the snow-balling one another, as the stock-brokers have been known to do when 'Change was dull. They have only a certain grim and cruel humour, such as the Yankees use, the point of which lies always in overreaching one another. Derrick was right when he said that Master Walter was not fit for such a calling, but the same thing might, almost with equal

force, have been said of himself. He was not, indeed, of an anxious disposition, but his temper, when once roused, was almost demoniacal, and he could never stand being cheated. Now, Cheating, in some form or other, is the soul of the turf.

Whenever it is possible to trot in that vast procession down to Epsom, the appearance of which is so gay, and the pace so funereal, the large-wheeled Hansom does it. Many a pretentious four-in-hand did the captain and Derrick pass, and many a wicked-looking brougham with its high stepping-steeds; and the occupants of each had often a word to say about "the fellow with the beard that Lisgard had picked up, and was carrying about with him everywhere." For the manly growth that fringed Ralph Derrick's chin was something portentous, even in these days of

beards, and his appearance was rendered still more striking from the fact of his wearing an infinite number of wooden dolls in the band of his hat, where Louis XI. used to stick the images of his patron saints. In vain Walter had informed him that this was a weakness only indulged in by snobs. Ralph rejoined (but not without an extra tinge of red in his weatherbeaten cheek), that being a snob himself, it was therefore only natural that he (Ralph) should take pleasure in thus adorning himself. He had rather be a snob than a nob, by a precious sight; he knew that. As for making an exhibition of himself, if that was really the case, it was only right that the public should be advertised of the matter, so he purchased a penny trumpet, and executed thereon the most discordant flourishes. "Say another word, lad," added

he, with cheerful malice, "and blessed if I don't buy a false nose!"

Walter made no further remonstrance; he leaned back in the Hansom as far he could, and as much behind the green gauze curtain, until they reached the course, when his companion divested himself of the objectionable ornaments, and made a present of a live tortoise, which he had also acquired on the way, to an importunate gipsy woman, instead of crossing her palm as requested "with a piece of silver." They could hear by this time the hum and the roar of the great human sea which surged about the railings in front of the Grand Stand, and in a few minutes more they were within them. They pushed their way through the babbling throng towards a certain corner that had been agreed upon, and there was Mr Tite

Chifney waiting for them, with a very pale face indeed.

"Nothing wrong with the horse, is there?" cried Ralph in a loud and menacing voice, which caused not a few sharp eyes to glance cunningly towards them, and set not a few sharp ears to listen to what might come next.

"No, sir, nothing," returned the trainer. "For Heaven's sake, speak low. I never saw him looking better in my life. We will see him now, if you like."

"Where's Blanquette?" continued Ralph, a little reassured by this, as they moved away towards the Paddock.

"Mr Blanquette is not here, Mr Derrick."

"Not here? Why, he was to join you the day before yesterday, otherwise I would have come myself."

"He *has* been here, sir, but he's gone away again?"

"What! Is he not coming back to-day?"

"I hope so, sir; I most sincerely hope so; but the fact is—now take it quietly, for it's none of my fault—he's gone after Jack Withers."

In an instant, while Walter ejaculated a smothered cry of agony and wrath, Derrick had seized the trainer by the throat. "You know me, sir," cried he. "As I swore to treat that tout on the Downs at Mirk, so will I treat you, if that jockey"——

But two blue-coated men had thrust themselves between the strong man and his victim; a gentleman in a tight-buttoned frock-coat was coming up, too, in plain clothes, with that swift determined stride peculiar to members of "the force," and

the crowd grew very thick about them, and a thousand eyes were being concentrated upon Ralph's furious face, he knew. If his temper was lost now, he felt that all was lost. With an effort that almost cost him a fit of apoplexy—"I am sorry," said he, "that I laid my hand upon you, Mr Chifney."

"That will do," returned the trainer quietly, arranging his neckcloth. "Mr Inspector, you know me, and there is no occasion for your services."

"All right, Mr Chifney, but you have got a rummish customer to deal with there," replied the guardian of the law, stroking his chin, and looking at Derrick, much as a vice-president of the Zoological Society might regard a novelty in wild beasts, that had been half-promised to the establishment, and then withdrawn.

"I have never been treated thus," complained the trainer, as the three moved away, and the gaping crowd gathered round some other object of attraction, "and have never deserved such treatment from any employer of mine, although I have kept racing-stables these thirty years. I can make some allowance for one who has so much money on this horse, as I know *you* have, Mr Derrick, but I give you my honour and word that I was as astounded as Mr Blanquette himself, when I heard the news that Jack had skedaddled. He was your own jockey, remember, not mine: no boy in my stables has ever played such a scurvy trick as this."

"Have you any boy that can take this scoundrel's place?" asked Captain Lisgard impatiently.

"I have got as good riders as can be got, Master Walter, upon so short a notice; and *Menelaus* shall have the pick of them. But you know what a devil of a temper the horse has; and this Withers was the only lad who understood him."

"How comes it that Blanquette has gone to look for him?" asked Derrick thoughtfully. "Does he know where he is likely to be found?"

"Not as I know of, sir," returned the trainer gravely, "He said he would bring him back Dead or Alive—those were his words."

"Stop a moment, Chifney," ejaculated Ralph. "I can scarcely find breath to utter even the suspicion of it; and the certainty would, I verily believe, choke me; but do you think it possible that all is not

quite on the square with Blanquette himself?"

"Well, Mr Derrick, I'd rather not say. Mr Blanquette is as much the owner of the horse as yourself. He's my employer too—and nobody ever heard Tite Chifney breathe a word"——

"Thousand devils!" cried Derrick, stamping his foot so that the print of it was left in the yielding turf; "is this a time for your senseless scruples? I ask you, do you think it possible that this man—my pal for years, one that has oftentimes faced death in my company, and once shared the last scanty meal that stood between us and starvation—do you think it possible, I say, that this man has sold the race?"

"Well, sir," replied Mr Chifney frankly, "about victuals eaten under the circumstances

you describe, of course I'm no judge; but as to friendship and that, I've known a son play his own father false upon the turf before now; and what an Englishman will do in the way of smartness, you may take your oath a Frenchman will do—and a deuced sight worse too. Moreover, since you press this question, I may say that your partner has been seen talking with Wiley—Lord Stonart's agent—more than once."

"And why, in the devil's name, was I not told?"

"That was not my business, Mr Derrick; you might not have thanked me for interfering with your affairs. I thought that you and Mr Blanquette were one. Besides, to confess the truth, I thought it was *The King* who was being nobbled. And since

Lord Stonart has chosen to withdraw his horses from my keeping—chiefly, by the by, through his disgust at that trial-race in which his crack was beaten—I, of course, was no longer bound to look after his interests; no, indeed, quite the reverse," added the trainer with an offended air.

"Did this Frenchman say he would be here to-day, if he did not find the boy?" inquired Captain Lisgard sharply, with an unpleasant look in his fine eyes.

"I can answer that question for him," returned the gold-digger grimly. "If he has played me false, he will not only not be *here;* he will have put the sea—and not the narrow one either—between himself and Ralph Derrick; for he knows me very well. But now"—here he drew a long breath, and made a motion with his mighty arms

as though he would dismiss that matter for the present, tempting as it was to dwell upon—"let us see the boy that is to take this rascal's place. We may pull through still with luck."

CHAPTER VII.

AT EPSOM.

HAVE you ever seen at the beginning of a Great Law Case a certain hush and stir among the gentlemen of the long robe, and then a young man rise—not much over forty, that is—and inform "my lud" that his unfortunate client was placed at a sad disadvantage, for that, through the unexpected but unavoidable absence of his leader, the whole case must needs devolve upon his own (the junior's) shoulders? The circumstance is of course most lamentable,

but still the young counsel (if he is worth a guinea fee) has a certain confident radiance about him, for he feels that his opportunity has come at last, and that he has but "to grasp the skirts of happy chance," to be borne from that moment woolsackwards. So was it with Mr Samuel Hicks, horse-jockey unattached, when suddenly called upon to fill the vacant seat of Brother Withers, absent without leave. To ride a Derby at a moment's notice was, to one in his position, almost what to take the command of the Mediterranean squadron would be to a young gentleman at the naval school. But not a trace of indecision was visible on the young centaur's countenance.

"I will do my best, gentlemen," said he modestly; then added, with the irrepressible

assurance of his class, "and I think I know how to ride."

"You know nothing, and are an infernal young fool," returned the trainer sharply. "You never were outside of such a horse as *Menelaus* in your life. If he is in a good temper, a child might steer him; but if he jibs—if he stands stock-still in that great race an hour hence, as he is as like to do as not—what will you do then?"

"Bless my soul, sir," cried the boy, his golden Future — not without "mother in a comfortable cottage, and easy for life," let us hope, in the foreground—all swept away by this relentless prediction—"Bless my soul, sir, I think I should cut his throat."

"I like this fellow," cried Derrick, slapping the lad upon the back. "Look you, here is twenty pounds, which you may keep in any

case, and you had better take it now, for if you lose the race, there will be plenty of folks to want all my money. But if you win, boy, I will make it Two Hundred."

"And I will make it Four," added Master Walter fervently.

"So, you see, you will be a made man for life," remarked the trainer kindly. "But listen to me, Sam, or else all this glitter will be the merest moonshine. Be sure never touch your horse with whip or spur; for Withers, I have noticed, never did. But if the beast jibs —I saw Jack do this at the trial-race, and once before—snatch at his ear. There may be some secret in the way of handling it, but there is no time for finding that out. Do you twist it hard."

"O sir, I'll twist it off, but he shall win, returned the jockey plaintively; and off he

went to don his new owner's colours—black and red—as proudly as an ensign to his first battle-field.

It had got about that there was some hitch about *Menelaus*, and the odds were rising rapidly against him; and when the large and somewhat ungainly animal took his preparatory canter in front of the stand under the guidance of the uncelebrated Hicks, they rose still higher. If any of his ancient confidence had remained to Captain Lisgard, he could scarcely have resisted the tempting offers that were being roared out in harsh and nasal tones from every quarter of the Ring.

"I'll lay 7 to 1 against *Many Laws*" (for most of the racing fraternity favoured Mr Derrick's pronunciation of that name); "I'll lay 8 to 1."

"I'll take 4 to 1. I name the Winner" (for the relation between *The King* and the French horse in the betting was that of buckets in a well).

"I take odds that *Menelaus* is not placed," exclaimed a shrill and sneering voice close beside where the two men most interested in that depreciated animal were standing.

"What odds will you take, my Lord?" inquired Captain Lisgard, biting his lip in wrath, for it was Lord Stonart who was offering them, the man whose confidential agent had been talking with Blanquette, and to whose machinations it was almost certainly owing that *Menelaus* had lost his rider.

"Ah, Lisgard, how are you?" returned he coolly. "How came it that I missed you

just now in the Paddock? Haven't seen you since that morning on Mirk Down. So we're going to try that race over again, eh?"

"I think you were asking for odds, my Lord, about the black horse being *placed?*" rejoined the captain, pale with passion at the sarcasm that lurked in the other's tone.

"Yes, so I was. There has something gone amiss, they say, with him. I'll take 4 to 1 in fifties—hundreds, if you like."

"Don't do it," whispered Derrick eagerly. "Don't you see what the scoundrel reckons upon? If the horse runs straight, he will win the race, but if he jibs, he will be nowhere. He is therefore taking odds where he ought to give them."

"You don't take me, eh?" continued his

Lordship. "Well, I think your friend advises you wisely. See, the horses are moving towards the hill. Like myself, you have no stall, I conclude. Where are you going to place yourself? I think I shall remain below here on the green."

"Then I shall see the race from the roof, my Lord," answered the captain savagely, and thither he and his companion betook themselves accordingly.

To look down from that elevation upon Epsom Downs just before the start for the Great Race, is to behold a wondrous spectacle. Men—a quarter of a million or so—as black and thick as bees, and emitting much such a hum and clangour as attends the swarming of those perilous insects; and the carriages, twelve deep—dwarfed to much the same proportions as those chariots which used to

be dragged in public by the Industrious Fleas. But raise your race-glass, and with a single sweep you survey every social degree of human life; from the duchess to the poor drunken hag on the look-out for empty bottles; from the peer to the ragged thief who bides his moment to snatch his booty from his Lordship's carriage-seat. This rascal's opportunity is coming. If there are five minutes in an Englishman's life in which he is indifferent to the preservation of his property, it is those five which are now at hand when that little jockey rainbow yonder is gathering on the hill. Thirty of the fleetest horses in the world are about to contend for the greatest prize that horse can win: it is not that circumstance, however, which makes so many hearts go pit-a-pat, keeps all lips sealed, and rivets every eye, except that of the pick-

pocket and his natural enemy the policeman, upon that shifting speck of colour. All are aware of the enormous interests that hang upon the result impending, even if they have none themselves; vague but gigantic shadows of loss and gain forecast themselves upon every mind. In a few seconds more, certain unknown scoundrels—fellow-creatures, however, with whom we have indissoluble sympathies—will be enriched beyond the dreams of avarice; and certain other poor devils will be ruined. A solemn hush pervades all Pandemonium. The very organ-grinders cease their hateful discord; the vendors of race-cards give their lungs brief respite; the proprietors of *Aunt Sallies* intermit their useless cry of "Three throws a penny," and stand on tiptoe, with their *fasces* beneath their arms, as eager as my Lord who

totters insecure erect upon the front seat of his drag. Nervous folks see all these things because they cannot keep their eyes fixed where they would. A sudden roar breaks forth, not in the least like human speech, but it means that They are Off!

"*Are* they off, Ralph?" inquires Master Walter of his companion, "or is it a lie?" His small and well-gloved hand is trembling so, that his race-glass gives him views like a kaleidoscope. Splendour or Penury—nay, worse, or Shame await him, and are at the threshold. He knows not yet the foot of which it is that draws so nigh; and he dares not look forth to see.

"They are not off yet, lad," returned Ralph; and even *he* has to swallow something which appears to be in his throat, but is not, before he can give that assurance.

Master Walter draws a long breath, for this is a reprieve, and endeavours once more to fix his eyes upon the dancing horses; but it is the retina of the mind only which presents its image. He beholds his mother's face, paler and more careworn than ever, sharpened with pain, through something which she has learned since——

"They're off! they're off!" is again the cry; and this time the great plane of faces shifts and flashes as it follows the speck of colour now in rapid motion—at first, a double line, next a lengthening oval, and then a string of brilliants, knotted here and there. As they approach Tattenham Corner, Walter perceives, for the first time, that they are horses, and that three are leading all the rest—Green, Black, and Yellow. The chances are then but two to

one against him. How they lag and crawl, these vaunted coursers of the air! How long is this frightful suspense to last? "The Yellow's beat — *Mica* is out of it — the Black wins — the favourite is beaten, blast him! — *Menelaus* wins"—— There is a thunder of hoofs, a flash of Black and Green, then a cry such as, even on Epsom Downs, was never before heard. "By Heaven, he's off! The boy is killed! Was it short of the post? What number's up? The Green has won. *The King, The King!* Hurrah, hurrah!" And so the babblement breaks forth again, and the tumultuous crowd flows in like water upon the fair green course, save one small space of it kept clear by men with staves, where lies a poor whitefaced jockey, senseless and motionless, for whose misfortune everybody

is sorry, but especially those who have backed the Black.

All had gone well with the French horse until within a few strides of the winning-post ; he was leading by half a length, and his victory seemed certain to all eyes, when suddenly — whether through the devilish nature of the beast, or whether poor Sam had touched him with the heel in that overwhelming crisis, can never now be known—but he stopped stock-still, and shot his rider (snatching at his ear as he flew by) a dozen yards, like cricket-ball from catapult. The uncelebrated Hicks had actually preceded the rival jockey at the post, but left his horse behind him ; and there the beast was standing yet, with his fore-feet planted resolutely before him, and his untwisted ears laid level with his neck,

as though he was giving "a back" at leap-frog.

"Come down, and let us get away from this, lad," broke forth Derrick impatiently: "it is no use waiting here."

"It is no use waiting here," echoed the young man mechanically, as he followed his friend through the fast-thinning crowd down to the basement story.

At the foot of the staircase they met Mr Chifney, looking very white and disconcerted. He, too, had put more trust than he was wont to place in horses in *Menelaus*, and had suffered in consequence; and the wily trainer was not used to losses.

"How is the boy?" inquired Derrick.

"Bad, sir, bad: it is a bad business altogether," muttered the man of horseflesh, not perhaps wholly thinking of the boy.

"It was not his fault, however," continued Ralph. "No man could have kept his seat during such a devil's trick. Look you, let him have all he requires; everything. I will be responsible."

Mr Chifney had expected from this stormy client some terrible outbreak of wrath and disappointment; and lo, he was all benevolence and charity! His astonishment exhibited itself significantly enough in his face; but Ralph mistook the cause.

"Why do you stare so, sir? I suppose I am good for a few pounds yet. The horse is mine; and I apprehend will be security enough; though I wish I could afford to shoot him—cursed beast! Where is Lord Stonart?"

"A Great Personage has, I have heard, just sent for him, to offer his congratulations."

Ralph Derrick uttered a harsh and bitter laugh.

"I suppose we couldn't see this interesting interview, eh?"

"Certainly not, sir," replied the trainer hurriedly, alarmed by Derrick's tone and air. "I hope you are not thinking of putting us all in the wrong by any act of violence?"

"Well, no; I thought of conferring the honour of knighthood upon his Lordship with a horsewhip—that's all."

"Take him away," whispered the trainer to Master Walter; "for Heaven's sake, take him home."

"Yes, home. Come home, Ralph," repeated the young man, like one in a dream.

"Ha, Lisgard, how goes it?" drawled Captain Wobegon, sauntering slowly up

to where the three were standing. "I hope you recouped yourself for last night's misfortunes by *The King* just now. Devilish near thing, though. The Frenchman did win by a head, but luckily it was the boy's, and not his own."

"I backed the wrong horse," returned Master Walter gloomily. "And I owe you —how much is it?"

"A little over fourteen hundred. If it's any convenience to you, I can wait a fortnight or so; I would say longer—but Lurline—she was inquiring after you, only yesterday, by the by; I felt quite jealous —has a soul above economy. And after the Derby, you know, folks send in their bills; especially jewellers. They know if they are not paid *then*, it's a bad look-out. What a lot that fellow Stonart must have

netted! I'm sorry to see you so down in the mouth; you used to be such a lucky fellow."

"Used to be such a lucky fellow," mused Master Walter, as he and his companion made their way to the outskirts of the heath, where a place had been appointed at which their Hansom was to wait for them. "Yes, so I was. I used to win in a small way, and yet people were always glad to see me. They won't be so pleasant, I reckon, when they find that I am a defaulter. I can't get at any money for a year, and who 'll wait a year without making a row? Even if they do, mine will be a fine coming of age. How *could* I have been such a frightful fool?"

"Tell your fortune, my pretty gentleman," observed a gipsy girl, laying her walnut-

coloured fingers upon the young man's coat-sleeve. "You are born under a lucky star."

"I may have been born there; but I have wandered far away from its influence," replied Master Walter, shaking her hand off somewhat roughly. "If you want a shilling, you shall have it; for I have nothing but other people's money about me, and that one always parts with very readily. But don't call me lucky, for that 's a lie, you jade."

"Bless your handsome face," returned the gipsy humbly, "it 's a shame that it ever should be crossed by the shadow of sorrow. You can't be unlucky, sir, with eyes like yours—especially," added she, as the two strode hastily away, "especially among the ladies."

"Do you hear *that,* lad?" laughed Derrick encouragingly; but the young man was too wrapt up in his own sombre thoughts to heed such things.

"I must sell out," muttered he to himself; "that's the first thing. And I must run down to Mirk; there is no knowing what that spitfire there may do else."

"Here's our Hansom, and the fellow not drunk for a wonder!" exclaimed Derrick. "Where's the horse, man?"

"In this next booth, sir," returned the driver. "I will put him to in no time.—I am afraid your honours have not won."

"See, Walter, lad," cried Derrick in remonstrance; "that's your fault. Don't hang out such signals of distress that everybody who meets us offers their confounded pity. Be a man, lad; be a man. Besides, what

did that gipsy girl say just now? Many a wise word is spoken in jest. She said, with your good looks, that you must needs be lucky with the women. I should like to see the heiress who would say 'No' to Captain Walter Lisgard. A good marriage would mend all this, and "——

"Go to the devil!" exclaimed the young man passionately.

"You are out of temper, lad," returned the other gravely; "but don't say those sort of things to me, for I have not deserved them."

"Not deserved them! you have been my ruin, curse you!" continued the other with vehemence. "But for you, you drunken"——

"Take you care, Walter Lisgard!" roared the bearded man in a voice of thunder.

"Do not make me strike you, for I would as soon strike my son. How can all this be my fault? Do you suppose that I have not lost also — almost all I have in the world save a few hundreds?"

"Ay, mine, I suppose," exclaimed Walter bitterly. "I know I owe you a thousand pounds."

"Yes," returned the other, producing his pocket-book, "here are three I.O.U.s bearing your signature, for two, three, and five hundred pounds."

"You shall be paid, sir, never fear," rejoined the young man insolently. "No man but you, however, would have produced them at such a time. But it serves me right for herding with such people."

"Thank you, young man. At the same time, few of your fine gentlemen would treat

them this way." Thus saying, he tore them into little strips, and scattered them to the wind.—"All I ask, by way of repayment, now is, that you will listen to a few words I have to say. I have loved you, Walter Lisgard, in spite of yourself, and would have laid down my life for yours. I have concealed from my own heart as well as I could the selfish baseness that underlies your every act—but that is over now. Look you, on the coasts where I have come from, there is many a bay which, if you saw it at high tide, you would say: 'What a beautiful harbour! what smooth and smiling water! This is a place for all men to cast anchor.' But when the tide is going out, you see how you have been deceived. Here is a reef that would wreck a navy; here is a jagged and cruel rock, and there

another and another. With every one, you say to yourself, surely this is the last. But for this and for that, there was never a better anchorage; and how beautiful the place is! What luxuriant foliage — what exquisite verdure fringes the shore—just the shores, you know. But when the tide is quite out, it is impossible to like the place any longer. There are nothing *but* reefs and rocks to be seen then, and a few loathsome reptiles among the slime. Now, Walter Lisgard, I have come upon you at dead low-water, and I don't wish to meet you any more. You will deceive others, of course, who may see you at the flow, but you will never deceive me. I shall go down to Mirk, after a little, to bring away my wife. Take my advice, and don't be there. Above all things, see that your

mother does not cross me in that matter, or it will be worse for all concerned. I have nobody now in the world who cares for me save Mary Forest, and they shall not rob me of her. Here is the Hansom in which we can no longer sit together. You are not used to walking, being what is called a gentleman, so you had better take it. All I ask you is, to leave our lodgings before I reach them, since you will arrive there first; or if not—I will take myself off elsewhere; I should be sorry to be under the same roof, with you again, young man."

Then pulling his hat forward upon his brow, in place of farewell, Ralph Derrick turned his back upon Walter Lisgard, and took his way to town on foot. As the captain, sitting alone in no very enviable

frame of mind, passed him afterwards upon the road, he could not help remarking to himself how old and bowed the insolent fellow looked.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS AYNTON'S THUMB IS TURNED BACK.

"I SUPPOSE, Mary, that I shall be sure of getting a letter from Mr Arthur to-day?" observed my Lady to her maid, as that confidential domestic was proceeding with the duties—which were by no means mysteries—of her toilet, upon the morning after the picnic at Belcomb. "He is certain to reply concerning a matter which was important enough to cause the use of the telegraph."

"I suppose so, my Lady: very like."

Nothing could be more in contrast than the tones in which these two persons had spoken; the question had been earnest, almost fervent, and one which evidently was put in order to evoke an affirmative answer; the reply was given carelessly enough, or rather as though the thoughts of her who uttered it were absent from the matter altogether.

"'*Very likely*,' Mary! Why, how can it be otherwise? Just run down and open the letter-bag; you know where to find the key."

"Yes, my Lady."

As Mary Forest left the room, she cast at her beloved mistress, whose eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon the pattern of the carpet, and observed her not, a look of unspeakable love and pity; and when the

door was shut between them, she burst into a passion of silent tears.

"It will kill her," murmured she; "she can never survive this second trouble. Sorrow and shame, sorrow and shame, are all that fall to my dear mistress now. *How* shall I tell her? May Heaven give her strength to bear it; but I wish, for her sake, that she was dead, and already the angel she deserves to be—— Ah, you minx!" ejaculated Mary, interrupting herself as she passed Miss Aynton's room, and shaking her plump fist at its unconscious tenant; "you'll go to quite another place, and serve you right too." And seemingly comforted by this reflection, she wiped her eyes with the hem of her apron, and hurried down the back-stairs upon her errand.

"What will Arthur think?" mused

my Lady, as she awaited her maid's return with a beating heart. "He will certainly connect the request to destroy that letter with what I said to him at the Watersmeet a while ago, about"—she did not utter the concluding words at all, but only formed them with her lips — " poor Ralph. If Arthur suspects, it will be with him the first step to knowledge ; and yet he would never use it to my hurt. If there were anything amiss in the concealment of this matter, then I should fear him, for he is the soul of honour. But my bastard son— God help him, if he ever comes to know it— robs nobody even of this barren title, and my children's money is due to no one else. They might have been paupers as well as bastards ; let their mother comfort herself with that thought all she can." My Lady's

lips were crooked into a bitter smile: hers was not a cynical face—far from it—and such an expression misbecame it sadly; it looked more like a contortion of the mouth induced by bodily pain.—"Well, Mary, is there no letter from Mr Arthur?"

"No, ma'am; none."

"Then there is one more cause for anxiety added to the rest of my troubles, that is all. Ah me, how foolishly I used to fret myself in days when there was no cause! Perhaps he never got the telegraph, and not understanding why the letter came to him, has transmitted it back to—to the person to whom it was addressed.—Mary, you had better presently run over to the *Lisgard Arms*, and see to that. Steve will give it up, if you explain to him that it is your handwriting. Tell him, if necessary, that I promise him

he shall not lose the inn. I must have that letter. Mr Arthur could not possibly know the London address of — of that person, could he ?"

"Very likely, my Lady, yes—at least, I don't know."

"Mary !"

"I beg your pardon, madam," replied the waiting-maid, starting like one aroused from a dream. "I was not thinking what I said; I was thinking of something else."

"I think you might give me your attention, Mary," returned my Lady sighing: "you cannot be thinking of anything so momentous as this matter, which involves sorrow, shame, and perchance utter ruin."

"Alas ! but I can, my Lady," answered the other gravely; "and I am doing it. There has something happened worse

than anything you can guess at. Master Walter"——

"Great Heaven! has any accident happened to my boy? I saw him but an hour ago; he came into my room, dear fellow, to bid me good-bye before he started for the station. The young horse was in the dog-cart—— O Mary, Mary, do not—do not tell me that my Walter is killed!"

"He is quite well, my Lady, so far as I know—quite well in health."

"Thank Heaven for that! Bless you for that, Mary! Why did you frighten me so, if there is nothing the matter?"

"There is something the matter, my Lady. Pray, command yourself; you will have need of all your fortitude. I would never tell it you—burdened as you are already—only you must know it; *you*,

above all, and no one else, if we can help it."

"More secrets! more deception, Mary! Spare me, if you can, dear friend; I am sorely tried already."

"I cannot spare you, my Lady, or I would do so, Heaven knows; nay, I would almost take the shame upon my own shoulders, if that might shield you from the sorrow it must needs bring with it. Miss Letty"——

"It is not fit that Shame and my daughter should be mentioned in the same breath," replied my Lady, rising, and speaking with dignity. "Do not continue; I forbid you to speak. What you were going to say is false, and I will not listen."

"It is true, my Lady—true as that the sun is shining now. Of course, Miss Letty

has nothing to do with it; but it was through her I learned it."

"Does she *know* it, then?" asked my Lady sternly.

"Certainly not, madam; and Heaven grant she never may. She's as pure-minded as any seraph, and, like Charity, thinketh no evil. But she told me this afternoon—seeing that you were troubled, and not liking to pain you, perhaps without reason, and speaking to me as her old nurse and friend, who loves all the Lisgards, good and bad (for they are not all good, alas, alas!), and who will love them to the end—she told me that something which she had overheard between Miss Rose and Master Walter"——

"You mean Sir Richard," interposed my Lady.

"No, madam—his brother. It was Master Walter that I was speaking of the other day in the carriage, and whom I understood your Ladyship to say that Miss Aynton had refused. I knew very well that they were love-making, flirting and such like upon the sly; but I did not know—I could not suspect—— O mistress dear, a terrible disgrace has befallen you, through that infamous young hussy, Miss Rose Aynton —though what Master Walter could have seen in the Jade, I am sure passes my comprehension altogether."

"Disgrace! Walter! Rose Aynton! What do you mean, woman?" asked my Lady angrily. "You must be mad, to say such things. I heard Sir Richard ask the girl to be his wife with my own ears, and she refused him."

"Did she, my Lady? Well, I'm surprised at that, for I should have thought she would have stuck at *nothing*.—But let me tell the whole story. What Miss Letty heard at the picnic was this: she heard Master Walter cursing Miss Rose. That was an odd thing for a young gentleman to do to a young lady—although, for that matter, I have no doubt she *deserved* it—was it not? Well, that was what Miss Letty thought. She had never heard such words before, and could scarcely force her innocent lips to repeat them; but I made her do it. And certainly Master Walter expressed himself pretty strong. It seems he was angered about the young woman's behaviour to his brother yesterday"——

"Ay," interrupted my Lady quietly, and still thinking that the prejudice of her waiting-maid had much exaggerated matters,

"that was partly my fault; I begged Miss Aynton to be more complaisant in her manner to Sir Richard."

"Well, Master Walter might have been annoyed, madam, but what right had he to be *jealous?* and especially what relation could exist between him and Miss Rose, which justified him in using such dreadful words? Fancy *swearing* at her, my Lady!"

"Yes, that is shocking indeed, Mary. Miss Letty, however, must certainly have misunderstood him."

"That's what I told her, my Lady, in hopes to quiet her a bit; but I did not believe it myself, no more than you do. We don't suppose that Miss Letty invented the oaths, do we?"

"That is true," sighed Lady Lisgard. "It makes me very wretched to think that

my boy Walter should have so far forgotten himself as to use such language to a young girl—a guest, too, in his mother's house. I shall certainly demand an explanation of it from his own lips."

"Alas, there is no need, madam," returned the waiting-maid. "I can tell you all—if you can bear to listen to it."

"I am listening," said my Lady wearily; but she sat with her back towards Mistress Forest, and once, in the course of her recital, she uttered a piteous moan, and covered her face with her hands.

"When Miss Letty told me what I have just said, my Lady, and had parted from me a little comforted, trying to persuade herself that she really might have been mistaken in what she had overheard, I

instantly sought out Anne Rees, and bade her come with me to my room. You wouldn't have believed it in a girl as you yourself chose out of the village school, and who has been at the Abbey under my own eye for four years; but she refused point-blank: very respectful, I must say, but also very firm. 'I durstn't do it,' said she, all of a twitter—'not till Miss Rose is abed and asleep; or if I do, you may be certain sure as she will come to know it, and get out of me every word that may pass between us two.'

"The girl looked as scared as though she had seen a ghost, and yet my request did not seem to come on her at all unexpected; and, in point of fact, she knew what she was wanted for well enough. However, I thought it best to let

her have her way; and so it was arranged that she was to come to my room as soon as she had done with the young ladies—although 'tis little enough, indeed, she has done for Miss Letty of late weeks, but all for that spiteful little hussy, Miss Rose.

"'Now,' said I when I got her alone, 'Anne Rees, there is nobody to listen to what we say, and you may speak to me as to your own mother.'

"'Ah, Mistress Forest,' answered she, beginning to whimper, 'I only wish I dared.'

"'This young lady has got you under her thumb, I see, Annie. Now, if you 'll tell me the whole truth of what is going on between her and Master Walter, I promise you that I 'll turn her thumb *back*. It will hurt her a little—and that you won't be sorry for, perhaps—and it will set you *free*.'

"'Oh, Mistress Forest, if you could only do *that*, I would be a good girl all my life, and never try on other people's clothes again, nor be a spy upon my Lady, and'—— Here she stopped quite short, and looked as though she would have bitten her tongue off.

"'Now, Anne,' said I, 'you *must* tell me, whether you will or not: for you have gone too far to turn back. How did Miss Rose Aynton make a slave of a well-conducted girl like you—with nothing but vanity, that I know of, to be said against you—and compel you to do all this dirty work for her?'

"'Well, Mistress Forest, as you truly say, I was always a vain child; and Heaven has punished me pretty sharp for it. One day, when the young ladies

were out, and I was in Miss Aynton's room a-setting it to rights, what should I come upon—where, perhaps, I had no right to look for it, for it was evidently meant to be hidden — but a queer-shaped leather box with trinkets in it.'

"'A jewel-case, I suppose you mean, Anne.'

"'Yes, ma'am; but they were none of those as Miss Aynton was in the habit of wearing — nor had she that box when she first came: she must have brought it down with her after she went back to London for a week in the early part of the year. However, all as struck me then was the beauty of the jewels; and I thought there was no harm in my just trying them on in the front of the swing mirror. My ears not being pierced, I couldn't fix the earrings, although I wouldn't

a-minded a little pain, and they sparkled like morning-dew ; but I clasped on the pearl necklace and the bracelets, and stood admiring myself in the looking-glass a good long time. Then all of a sudden I saw an angry face looking over my shoulder, and heard a cruel voice whisper: "Thief, thief!" just like the hiss of a wood-snake. I scarcely recognised Miss Rose, who had always looked so pleasant, and been such a smooth-spoken young lady.

"'I could send you to prison, Anne Rees for this," continued she, very grave and slow; "and I *will,* too, if you don't do everything I tell you. I hate a thief."

"'Lor, miss," cried I, "have mercy, for Heaven's sake! I never meant to thieve nothing."

"'And I hate a liar," added she, looking so cold and cruel that she made me shudder. "You break open my drawer — not a word, you bad girl, or I'll send to Dalwynch for a policeman — and I actually find my property on your very person! You ought to go to jail for this; and perhaps I am wrong not to send you there. However, remember; from this moment, you are *my* servant—only mine; and whatever I tell you to do, whether it is against your late mistress or not, see that you do it; and dare not to breathe one word of anything that I do, or speak, or possess — such as these jewels, for instance—or you will rue it bitterly, Anne Rees."

"'Of course I promised, Mistress Forest, for I was in such a state of terror that I would have promised anything; but you

cannot imagine to what a slavery I bound myself!'

"'I know all about that, Anne,' said I: 'everybody knows you're become a spy and a sneak. But there is no occasion for you to follow such vocations any longer. My Lady would never believe a word of your intending to steal those things: I can promise you her protection; so make your mind quite easy upon that point.—But now, what about Master Walter?'

"'Well, Mistress Forest, the jewels were his present, to begin with. There have been very wicked goings on. It was quite dreadful to see her kiss dear good Miss Letty at night, and return her "God bless you!" so pious like, when she was not blessing her — I mean Miss Rose — at all. Oh, Mistress Forest, I have known all this

for weeks and weeks, and dared not speak one word; and now the truth is almost too terrible to tell.'

"And then, my Lady," pursued Mistress Forest, "she told me things which it is not necessary to repeat to you. I knew she was telling truth; but in order to assure myself that it was so, I crept out with naked feet, and listened at Miss Aynton's door, and I heard *two* voices"——

"Did you *recognise* them, woman; are you sure of that?" asked my Lady sternly.

"Ah, yes, madam—there is no doubt."

"Heaven help us, and forgive us!" murmured my Lady, with bowed head. "Ah, Walter, Walter, I had expected Shame, but not from deed of yours! Where is this—Miss Aynton, Mary?"

"At her breakfast, my Lady; and doubt-

less making an exceedingly good one. *She* is not one to let her conscience interfere with her appetite, bless you! Like the murderer under sentence in Dalwynch jail, as I read of in the paper yesterday, she 'takes her meals with regularity,' I warrant; and does not in any way physically deteriorate under the distressing circumstances of her situation."

"Send her to me, Mary—in the boudoir yonder," said my Lady gravely. "Tell her I desire to speak with her very particularly. Breakfast? No, alas! I feel as though a morsel of food would choke me. Send her hither at once."

CHAPTER IX.

THRUST AND COUNTER-THRUST.

I CANNOT, for my own part, at all agree with the depreciatory expressions used by Mistress Forest with respect to Miss Rose Aynton's personal appearance. "What Master Walter could have seen in her," &c., it was easy enough for anybody else to see who was not of her own sex. A magnificent figure, masses of silken hair that, when unbound, would ripple almost to her dainty feet, and a countenance "bright as light, and clear as wind;" and indeed

this latter was too keen and sharply cut for my taste. The sort of expression which one likes to see in one's lawyer, does not so well become the object of our heart's affections. Of course, there was nothing of steel about Miss Rose, except what might have been in her crinoline; but I never saw man or woman who gave me so much the idea of being armed *cap-à-pied;* she seemed to be equipped in a complete Milan suit of proof, impregnable, invulnerable. Like *Le Noir Fainéant* in *Ivanhoe*, she never attacked anybody, although my Lady fancied she had recently detected signs of aggression about her; and those who knew her best avoided putting the temptation in her way. But when she entered her hostess's boudoir by invitation, upon that particular morning, she looked not only, as usual, on

her guard; there was also a certain slumbrous fire in her dark eyes, which betokened onslaught—the initiative of battle. My Lady herself remarked it, not without pity. "How little is this poor lost creature aware," thought she, "that I know all."

But she was quite wrong in this. Miss Rose had almost gathered the truth from the trembling fingers and frightened manner of her tiring-maid that morning; and the thing had been quite confirmed to her by the malicious triumph with which Mary Forest had delivered her mistress's request to see her in the boudoir upon very particular business.

"Will you please to sit down, Miss Aynton?"

Yes, it was so. The secret was out. Not even a morning salutation from her friend

and hostess; and the hand only outstretched to point her out a chair at the other extremity of the room. "Before proceeding with what I have to say," began my Lady, "I wish to know whether your aunt is in town."

"I believe so, Lady Lisgard; I think she has come back from Leamington—although I have not heard from her for the last two days."

"That is well. When I hinted, yesterday morning, that it would be better for you to return to London, I was unaware of the *necessity* for your departure from this roof at once—*immediately*—and for ever."

"Indeed!" Not a muscle moved: confident in the goodness, if not of her cause, at least of her Milan suit; conscious, too, of the possession of a Damascus poniard, undreamed

of by the foe, and admirable for close encounters, her right hand nervously opened and shut as though to clutch the handle—that was all.

"You have disgraced this house and me: yourself and your sex."

"You lie, insolent woman," returned the other; "*and judge others by yourself.*"

Each started to her feet, and looked her enemy in the face as she slung these words of flame.

"It is worse than useless, girl, thus to brazen it out," continued my Lady, attaching no importance to the emphasis the other laid upon her last words. "Outraging not only moral laws, but even the rites of hospitality, you have intrigued with my own son under my own roof."

"You dare to say so, Lady Lisgard, do

you? It is only for his sake, I swear, that I do not brand *you* Wanton, for that calumny. I *could* do it; you know I could, although you wear that look of wonder. Was not that man Derrick once your lover? Ah! you wince at that. Sir Robert—good, easy man—he knew nothing, of course"—— Here she stopped, for my Lady's face was terrible to look upon.

"Be silent, bad, bold girl! You shoot your poisoned arrows at a venture, and aim nothing home. You know not what a wife should be—how should you? *You!*"

It is not true that the swan is "born to be the only graceful shape of Scorn." A fair woman unjustly slandered is its rival therein. Rose Aynton cowered before that keen contempt—beneath the dropping of

those bitter words — as though they were sword and fire.

"I will never forgive you this, Lady Lisgard," muttered she—"never, never!"

"*You! you* forgive! To such as you, it would be idle to protest my soul is spotless. The man whose name you have soiled by uttering it—my husband—he, in high heaven, knows right well that never so much as thought of mine has wronged him. Vile, evil-minded girl, as false as frail!"

"That is sufficient, madam; almost enough, even if I were indeed the thing you take me for." Here the girl paused to moisten her dry lips, and catch her breath, of which passion had almost deprived her. "Now, look you, I was wrong. I thought my Lady was not so lily-pure as the world took her to be, and I was wrong. I have seen

things with my own eyes, and through the eyes of others, that might well entitle me to say: 'I still believe it.' I tell you, Lady Lisgard, I have *proofs* — or what seemed to me to be so, a few minutes back—of the charge that has so moved you, such as would amply justify my disbelief in your denial. But I honestly avow that I was wrong."

"I thank you, Miss Rose Aynton, for your charity."

"Spare your scorn, madam. It is no charity that moves me; nay, far from it. Convinced almost against my will, I own, by your unsupported assertion—your mere 'No,' I have withdrawn an accusation for which I have been patiently preparing evidence this long time—not, indeed, for your hurt, but for my own safety and

convenience, and hereby confess it baseless and unjust. Now, on your part, I do beseech you, make amends to *me*. You, too, have had your seeming proofs of my disgrace; you, too, have heard and seen yourself, or through the eyes and ears of others, certain"——

"Add not, lost, wretched girl," interposed my Lady, "deceit to sin! All that is left you is to pray to Heaven for pardon, and to leave that hospitable roof which you have disgraced."

Rose Aynton's gipsy face grew drawn and pale. She had aimed her blow, and missed; the weapon in which she had put so much trust had proved utterly good for nothing. All her schemes of the last few months were rendered fruitless, and the discoveries to which she had attached such vast importance,

and which she had attained to by such mean arts, shewn to be vain and futile. And now that she had humiliated herself by owning this, and thrown herself at this woman's feet, she would not extend so much as a finger-tip to help her.

"Lady Lisgard, as I hope for heaven," cried she in anguish, "I am innocent of that with which you charge me; I am honest as yourself, or Letty. Alas, you shudder, because I dare to compare myself with your pure daughter; you think that I soil that name, too, by uttering it. What shall I say—by what shall I swear, in order to make you believe me?"

"I would to Heaven I *could* believe you, Rose," returned my Lady sadly, touched in spite of herself by the girl's yearning appeal. "If you could erase this damning blot upon

my son's fair name, and give me back my Walter—as I deemed him but an hour ago—I would be so grateful, girl, that you should almost think I loved you."

"You *would!*" cried Rose with eagerness; then added bitterly: "But no; you mean if I could say: 'Your son has never pressed his lips to these, has never sworn to be mine, and mine alone.' But you would not thank me for merely proving that in this, although he did it, he was not to blame."

"What! not to blame?"

"No, madam—for even for *his* sake, I cannot longer bear this burden of undeserved shame. *Walter Lisgard is my husband.* We were married weeks ago, when I went to London in the spring."

"Married, married!" gasped my Lady. "Thank God for that! Far better to

deceive *me*, boy, than this poor girl. I never thought to say: 'I am glad you are my daughter-in-law, Rose Aynton;' but I do say so now." She took both her hands in hers, and gazed upon her downcast face, now overspread with blushes, and tinged for once with genuine tenderness. "It moves you, does it, that I am thankful to see the honour of my son preserved at some sacrifice of his prospects. How little do you know me, girl! yet I am glad to move you anyway. Rose, be a kind wife to him. I will not blame you for what has happened, although I have much cause. I must blame *him* rather. Who can wonder that you yielded when he said: 'Be mine.' So gentle and so loving as he can be! Now, too, I see it all. When you refused Sir Richard in the library, you were actually

his brother's wife. Ah, Heaven, you must not remain here longer—not a day. I shall write to Walter"——

"Nay, madam—*mother*," exclaimed Rose beseechingly, "I pray you let *me* write. I have broken my plighted word, and disobeyed my husband's bidding in revealing this. To please him, I had resolved to defend myself this morning as I best might, by returning thrust for thrust, without using this shield—my innocence—at all. But your bitter words—a shower of barbed darts—drove me behind it. He will be very wrath with me indeed, madam; but far worse if the news comes from you. He has much just now to make him anxious too."

"Indeed," replied my Lady hastily. "How is it, then, that I have heard nothing of it? But I forgot; it is *you* who have his secrets

now. Yes, you shall write, not I. Tell him that I am sorry—sorry that he should have deceived me above all; but that I forgive him freely. He knows that, however, right well. He must not come back to Mirk until he hears from me; and you, Rose, you must join him without delay. Every member of this household must learn at once that you are Walter's wife; but not till you have gone—for Richard's sake."

My Lady's thoughts, as always, were for others; even when this great blow had well-nigh stunned her, she did not permit herself the luxury of selfish grief. She was already busy with schemes for the benefit of her erring boy; how to contrive and where to save without prejudice to Sir Richard's interests (for *that* must be now avoided above everything) so that a

respectable allowance might be meted out to the young couple. She could not respect, and far less love the girl who had become her Walter's wife in so clandestine a manner; but still she *was* his wife, and therefore, in her eyes, a something precious. Then, bad as matters were, they might have been far worse; she had fully expected that they were so; and she felt in some sort grateful to accept this product of rashness and deceit in place of downright shame. Moreover, she foresaw in her own mind, for ever dwelling on such contingencies, that out of this evil a certain good might come, in case of that terrible misfortune befalling her, compared with which this present sorrow was as the prick of a pin's point.

Rose, upon her part, had certainly cause for

congratulation upon the result of this interview. Although her weapon of offence had failed her—and she was genuinely convinced of the groundlessness of her late suspicions concerning Lady Lisgard—she had found in her mother-in-law a most generous adversary, and one certainly far more forgiving than she deserved. Even the worst of us, I conclude, are not bad at all times, and when my Lady, as they parted, touched her brow with her pale lips, and murmured once more: "Be a kind wife to him, Rose," that young woman mustered an honest tear or two—of which articles, to do her justice, she did not keep, like some women, a constant supply on hand for social emergencies.

Not until she regained her own room did she begin to think that she had been unnecessarily humble, and had weakly suffered herself

to be moved by the show of forgiveness and good-will which my Lady had doubtless put on for her own purposes. However, the confession had been made, and upon the whole, most satisfactorily got over, the thought of which had oppressed her of late more than she cared to own, and made her bitter against her mother-in-law, as people generally feel towards those whom they are conscious of having wronged. And now there was that letter to write to Walter, which we have seen him peruse with such disfavour at his hotel in Town, acquainting him with her premature avowal of their common secret; and many a line of dexterous excuse she wove, and many a line of affectionate pleading, only to be torn up and recomposed again and again; for there was one person in the world beside herself whom Rose loved dearly, and yet of whom

she stood in deepest awe; and he whom she both loved and feared with all the strength of her energetic nature, was her husband—Walter Lisgard.

CHAPTER X.

NO LETTERS.

UPON the morning after the interview between Rose and Lady Lisgard, the latter again sent down Mistress Forest for the post-bag, and was once more disappointed at receiving no news from Arthur Haldane; not only did the interval of twenty-four hours make this matter additionally serious, and increase her former apprehensions that he had not received her telegram, and might find some means of forwarding Derrick's letter to himself—

since it had certainly not come back to the *Lisgard Arms;* but there was a still graver cause for anxiety in the fact that Mary Forest also received no reply from Ralph to that rejection so decidedly yet courteously composed by her mistress, with the view of taking away all hope, and at the same time of leaving as little sting of anger as was possible. Lady Lisgard would have almost preferred to have received from this man a declaration of open warfare—an expressed resolution of carrying away Mary as his wife, in spite of all obstacles—rather than this menacing No Answer. Contemptuous silence was not at all the natural line for one of his violent character to take, if he had decided to treat her waiting-woman's letter as final. He was more likely in that case to have penned a tornado of invective,

and bidden both mistress and maid to have gone to the devil. It seemed only too probable, then, that he was determined—as he had threatened—to take no denial; and that he would return in person, sooner or later, to Mirk, to prosecute his suit.

My Lady made certain preparations for that extremity—nay, for the worst that could possibly arise—chief among which was the composition of a very long and carefully-conned epistle to her eldest son, that she put by in her desk undated and unsealed, so that additions could be made to it at pleasure. Then she waited in agonies of suspense day after day; and yet no letter came for her maid from Ralph, or for herself from Arthur Haldane. Moreover, although, in her absorbing anxiety about the more serious subject, this affected my Lady far less

than it did Rose, no communication came from Walter in answer to her long and justificatory letter, acquainting him with the disclosure of their marriage. Our readers are aware that this last circumstance was simply due to the fact, that it was reposing in the "address-box" of the *Turf Hotel,* until such time as it caught the eye of the overworked waiter, and was carried over with apologies to Walter's lodgings, whither he had given orders that anything addressed to him should be conveyed forthwith. But he had not particularly expected a letter from that quarter—or, at all events, felt very anxious to get it—for nobody but Rose would have written to him to the *Turf Hotel,* all others at Mirk and elsewhere believing him to be at Canterbury with his regiment, whence all communications were forwarded to him to

his London lodgings. Thus, from the very deceit to which she had lent herself—to her peculiar information as to his movements—was this failure of Rose's letter to reach her husband owing. During this protracted interval, she suffered agonies of suspense, of mortification, and even of fear. It was wormwood to have to say to her mother-in-law every morning: "He has not written yet," and thereby to confess that Walter treated with indifference the embarrassing position in which she was now placed at Mirk Abbey; moreover, she surmised that her husband was too much enraged with her disobedience in betraying their secret, to write at all.

His wife knew—although few others did—that Master Walter was capable of being "put out" to a very considerable extent. His very marriage with herself—although

she fortunately did not know *that*—had been mainly owing to his impatience of opposition, and pique against his elder brother. Doubtless propinquity and opportunities of flirtation with a beautiful and accomplished girl, not by any means lavish of her smiles, but whose devotion to himself had been almost that of a slave for her master, had carried the handsome captain towards the gulf of matrimony; but it was the desire to thwart Sir Richard—who, his jealous eye perceived, was falling seriously in love with Rose long before *she* saw it—which was the final cause of his rash act. He eagerly snatched at an occasion at once of self-gratification, and of humiliating his proud and arrogant brother. He was delighted to let him know that neither his wealth nor his title could weigh in the

balance of a woman's favour against the gifts and graces which it was his habit to depreciate or ignore. We have said that he discovered Sir Richard's passion even before the object of it; but Rose's subtle brain was already preoccupied with himself. To give that scheming beauty her due, I think that even had she not been already Walter's wife, she would not have exchanged him for the baronet, at the period when he made her that dazzling offer in the Library. She felt that she had let slip a splendid prize, and was proportionally angry with Sir Richard, whose backwardness and hauteur had prevented her from recognising the possibility of its falling to her lot; but the feeling of disappointment was but transient; she was a bride of only a few weeks, and to get disenchanted of one like Walter

Lisgard is a long process even for a wife. By this time, however, though she idolised him, still Rose had learned to fear him; and absolutely dared not pen another letter to inquire the reason of his silence.

Of those who waited, sick at heart, for the coming of the postman every morning, Lady Lisgard, therefore, was the first to lose patience. She wrote to Arthur Haldane a few urgent lines, requesting his immediate presence at Mirk "upon private and particular business;" and within an hour of their receipt he took the train, and appeared in person at the Abbey. My Lady had decided to consult him, in preference to his father, respecting the arrangements necessary to be made for the future maintenance of Walter and his wife, since it would be very unwise to make so much importance of the

matter concerning Derrick, about which she was in reality vastly more concerned, and burned to know the truth.

"What is the matter, *ma mère?*" inquired he tenderly, when, not without the exercise of some address—for Sir Richard was always hospitable, and (especially in the absence of his brother) both gracious and attentive to all guests—Arthur and my Lady had managed to get an hour to themselves in the boudoir. "You look very pale and anxious."

"Yes, Arthur, I have enough to make me so. Walter has secretly made Rose Aynton his wife. Ah! you pity me, I see, and perhaps him also. Do not condole with me, however. I have sent for you hither to help me to make the best —— Alas, alas, you would not have

believed it of my Walter, would you?" And my Lady, touched by the sympathising look and manner of the honest young fellow, burst into the first "good cry" which she had permitted to herself since the calamity had been discovered; for when confiding the circumstance to Letty, it had been her duty to bear up, and when alone, a still more serious anxiety consumed her. Even now, her emotion, though violent, was soon over, and the indulgence in it seemed to have done her good. "Pardon me, Arthur," said she, with one of her old smiles; "I won't be foolish any more." And then, after narrating matters with which we are acquainted, she laid before him, as concisely as she could, what funds at her own disposal could be made available to form an income for the young couple, in

addition to the interest which Walter's fortune of five thousand pounds or so, into the possession of which he would come in some eighteen months, would yield. She little knew that on that very night—for it was the eve of the Derby Day—the unworthy boy, for whom she was making such sacrifices, was about to risk and lose more than a third of his patrimony, and that upon the next day the remainder was doomed to go, and much more with it.

"But this will pinch you, *ma mère,*" reasoned Arthur kindly, "and narrow your own already somewhat scanty revenue sadly. Sir Richard will come into a very fine rent-roll in June, beside thousands"

"But can we ask him to help Walter and *his wife?* And could Walter take it,

even if his brother were generous enough to offer it?"

"Sir Richard is quite capable of such magnanimity, *ma mère,* unless I am much mistaken in his character. He would not like to see his brother—even were he but a Lisgard, let alone his so near kith and kin—in a position that would be discreditable to the family; while if one has really loved a woman, one surely does not wish to see her poor and struggling, simply because she has preferred some one else. As for Walter's accepting the help which his brother can so well spare—it may be a little bitter—but, in my opinion, that would be far preferable to receiving what would impoverish his mother. The arrangements you propose would leave you but three hundred pounds a year."

"Yes," answered my Lady hastily, "I require that for a purpose, else half the sum would easily suffice my present needs."

"It would do nothing of the sort, *ma mère.* Come, let us be reasonable. If you will leave this matter in my hands, I will endeavour to be the mediator between your sons. Sir Richard has an honest regard for me, I think, and Walter also, when he is himself."

"Poor Walter!" murmured my Lady sighing.

"Yes, he is to be pitied," answered the other drily; "but also, between ourselves —although I shall endeavour, after my lawyer instincts, to make it appear otherwise to his brother — to be somewhat blamed, *ma mère.* Since, then, I am prepared, under the cloak of arbitrator, to be the partisan of your darling—— Yes, they are both

your darlings, Lady Lisgard, I know, but with a difference."

"Walter is in trouble," urged my Lady pitifully.

"Yes, that is the reason, of course. However, will you put the case unreservedly in my own hands? for if so, although it is not an easy task, I will do my best to make your sons shake hands."

"There is none like you, Arthur, none. Heaven bless you and reward you!"

"There may be none like me, *ma mère*, but there are also, I hope, many people a great deal better. And now that we have done with this matter for the present, may I ask, Why letters are directed to another person, under care to me, which I am at the same time directed by telegram to put behind the fire?"

"Oh, you got that telegram, did you?" said my Lady quietly. "Mary Forest entreated me so to send it. The fact was, she accepted that person by letter—what was his name?—of whom we spoke together some time ago at the Watersmeet; but afterwards, persuaded by me (acting in accordance with your suggestion, you remember), she decided to refuse him. But the first letter was unfortunately posted before the second was written; and the postmistress at Dalwynch positively refused to give it up, although I drove over there myself to request it."

"Well, upon my life, *ma mère*, but you're a bold woman," exclaimed the young lawyer laughing. "Why, of course, she wouldn't give it up. She would be stealing the property of the Postmaster-

general if she had done so, and you would be the receiver with the guiltiest knowledge."

"Well, at all events, she did not," pursued my Lady simply. "She would do nothing beyond directing the envelope afresh to your address."

"Honest creature!" interrupted Arthur grimly.

"Under these circumstances, I telegraphed to you, knowing that you would be good enough to destroy the letter directly it reached you."

"Yes, *ma mère,* and I did so," returned Arthur gravely; "but I feared it was not right, and now that you have told me this, I know that it was wrong. You may have had your reasons, dear Lady Lisgard, and doubtless very urgent ones, to wish the destruction of those letters."

"Those letters!" exclaimed my Lady.

"Yes, I am certain, of course, that you intended no harm to any one, and that what you did was in ignorance of the law; but so suspicious was I of your having transgressed it—and at the same time, perhaps, a little annoyed that you should have chosen *me*, Lady Lisgard, for your instrument in such a matter—that I purposely omitted to communicate with you, to put in writing any evidence whatsoever of that transaction."

"Yes, yes," said my Lady hastily, and taking no notice of the young man's evident annoyance. "But you speak of *letters*. There was only *one* letter directed to Pump Court."

"There were two, Lady Lisgard, and both addressed in the same handwriting. The words, *Turf Hotel, Piccadilly*, were crossed

out also, in each case, I remember, in red ink. It was the postmistress who did it, I have no doubt. If you led her to imagine that that was the wrong address in the one instance, she naturally imagined it to be so in the other, and probably made the alteration in all good faith."

"Great Heaven, and so it must have been!" exclaimed my Lady, clasping her hands. "O Arthur, this mischance—if my misconduct does indeed deserve punishment, has brought, I fear, a very harsh and bitter one—that is on Mary. The second letter should have reached the person to whom it was addressed without fail. He will now have heard nothing—this Derrick; and he will take the woman's silence for consent. O Arthur, Arthur, you little know what bad news this is."

"I can see, *ma mère*, that it vexes you," answered the young man kindly; "and that is evil enough for me to know. Some sorrows are best kept to one's self, I think. Now, look you, this Mr Derrick will certainly, being a sporting-man, be in town to-morrow night. He will not have left his hotel before the Derby is over. Now, I will go and seek him out to-morrow with the letter in my hand that Mary shall re-write. We have only but a very little time, remember."

"Dear Arthur, counsellor, and friend, and son in one, what comfort do you not give me in all straits!" She rose and offered him her pale but comely cheek, which the young man touched with reverent lips; then holding her hand in his, he said in a firm voice: "And now, *ma mère*, even that is not fee enough for such an avaricious

lawyer as I am. I have promised myself a talk with Letty."

"Do so, and Heaven bless you, my dear boy—ay, bless you both," continued my Lady, when he had left the room, "for you would take her for your wife even though you knew what I know of her unhappy birth. I have almost a mind to tell him; but then, with his stern notions of what is right—although, Heaven knows, I wrong no one by this reticence—he might—— 'Some sorrows are best kept to one's self, I think,' said he. And whether he suspects something amiss, and meant the words for my particular ear or not, it is sound advice. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. If I were always to be thinking of the morrow, I should soon go mad."

CHAPTER XI.

MR ARTHUR HALDANE MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL.

SOME writers are very fond of describing interviews between betrothed persons, and there are undoubtedly readers who take a pleasure in reading such delicate details; and yet it seems strange that this should be so, with respect to the mere description of what in real life is undoubtedly tame and stupid to the looker-on; for what can be duller, or more uninteresting, except to one another, than "an engaged couple." With what meaningless emphasis they smile;

what mysterious secrets (known to every adult in the company) they interchange; and how they go blindly feeling after one another's hands under the table, whenever the opportunity offers. I think it even profane to mention such tender mysteries. Arthur Haldane and Letty Lisgard were not indeed a betrothed couple when they met upon the present occasion, but they became so before they parted. Their subject of conversation being the marriage of somebody else, it naturally enough strayed to their own. "I am not a good match for you, Letty, just at present," said the young man frankly, during a lucid interval, "but I do not despair of removing the disparity of fortune. I am getting on in my profession better than I could have hoped for."

"I don't see why 'disparity' of any sort, dear Arthur, should affect persons who really love one another."

"That's my own sweet Letty," replied the other (relapsing). "But then your family—no exertions of mine can procure for me such a pedigree as you can boast of."

"That is a matter of genuine congratulation, Arthur. Dear Richard often makes me wish that there were no such things as ancestors. I suppose it is a dreadful heresy, but it seems to me so strange that people are not taken for what they *are*, let their birth be what it will."

"My Rose of Radicals!" exclaimed the young man with admiration; "your words deserve to be written in letters of gold." And so saying, he took out his

pocket-book, and, in spite of her opposition, transcribed them then and there.

"Of what possible good can *that* be, you dear foolish fellow?"

"I cannot say for certain, Letty," answered he gravely. "But keep a thing long enough, and its use will come, folks say."

Mr Arthur Haldane had, as we are aware, some other interviews awaiting him, less agreeable than the one on hand, which perhaps may account for his prolonging it to an inordinate length. There was no difference of opinion expressed in this one; and what is unusual in arguments between the sexes, the lady had not the last word at parting. Strictly speaking, neither had it. The farewell of each expired almost at the same instant, and was not breathed

into the *ear* at all: I say "almost" advisedly, and from a desire to be accurate, for if each imprints a kiss upon the other's *cheek*, they cannot do it quite coincidently; and it is certain, if the statistics of the matter could be collected, that nine engaged couples (for, of course, no couple does it who are *not* engaged) out of every ten do salute one another in that way, and not press "lip to lip," as the poets make out; in fact, it requires a particular and uniform conformation of nose—both must be "snubs" —to render the thing practicable.

Sir Richard, whom we have been compelled occasionally to represent in an unfavourable light, did not fall short, in his interview with Arthur Haldane, of the high estimate which the latter had formed of his chivalric nature; or perhaps it was through his overweening pride,

that could not permit the woman upon whom his affections had once condescended to rest, to be inconvenienced by narrow circumstances; but, actuated by whatever motive, his behaviour towards the rash young couple was liberal in the extreme. He accepted very willingly the explanation, given by the young lawyer with great tact, of his refusal by Rose Aynton. No utterance was given to the remark, that if he had pressed his suit a little earlier, doubtless no thought of his younger brother would have entered the girl's brain; but the suggestion was, somehow or other, delicately conveyed, and in that Gilead there was balm. Strange as it may appear, the object of his rejected suit seemed to have won forgiveness not only for herself, but for her husband, to whose faults he had heretofore shewn himself so unfraternally

alive. He certainly did not request Arthur to offer his congratulations to the young Benedict; but he sent by him a conciliatory message, and a special request that Captain and Mrs Lisgard would not fail to visit the Abbey upon the occasion of the approaching *fête*. The period of his own coming of age would be a very fitting one for the newly-married pair to introduce themselves to the people of the country, while their presence at such a time would evidence that there was no family breach. In all this, there was doubtless a leaven of selfishness; but there was considerable magnanimity also, and the manner in which the baronet spoke of Rose herself would have done honour to Bayard. In this matter, it must be even conceded that he shewed more nobility of spirit

than the ladies of his household. His mother had forgiven the girl, after a fashion, it is true; but her feelings towards her were anything but genial. One's heart cannot be made to yearn towards a sly and deceitful young person, just because she happens to be one's daughter-in-law. Her pity for Walter was great, but it did not beget Love for *her*.

With Letty, again, Rose stood even lower, or perhaps seemed to do so, from the higher eminence which she had previously occupied in the affections of her school-friend. A young lady who has sworn an eternal friendship, does not relish the discovery that the other party to that solemn transaction has been making a fool of her under her own roof for months; nay, has been systematically deceiving her

upon a matter mutual confidences concerning which form the very basis of such compacts—namely, the Beloved Object. Young men do not encourage one another to communicate their honest love-secrets, although some are boastful enough of their conquests over the sex, where there is no pretence of the heart being concerned ; but with young ladies, this sort of information is the most prized of all. There is a tacit, if not an expressed understanding between female friends, that the first genuine "attachment" formed by either shall at once be revealed to the other. The expectation of that tender avowal is what is uppermost in their minds whenever they meet ; and when it *has* been made, what an endless subject of sympathy does the unconscious swain become between these

devoted young persons! How the qualities of his mind are canvassed, and the colour of his hair; how his religious principles are eulogised, and also his small feet; and how, in short, the Betrothed and her faithful Confidante construct a mental and physical ideal for Jones, out of what they have read of the Admirable Crichton and the Apollo Belvedere. Letty Lisgard was as good a girl—in my opinion—as ever drew breath; but she was human, and when she kissed Rose the first time after she learned she had become her sister, it was by no means the impassioned salute which it had used to be, nor had her "my dear," although delivered with emphasis, at all the genuine ring.

As for the other females at the Abbey, it was fortunate for Rose that she had not

to apply to *them* for a character ; for although Mistress Forest knew her place better than to circulate scandal, Miss Anne Rees, no longer restrained by terror of the constabulary, indemnified herself for previous reticence, by favouring her fellow-servants with some very curious details indeed with respect to Mrs Walter Lisgard. My Lady's proposal, that Rose should take advantage of Mr Arthur Haldane's escort on the morrow to her aunt's house, until she should receive her husband's directions as to her future place of abode, was, I think, very generally welcomed, and felt to be a relief by the whole house.

During the long railway journey to town, however, she made herself agreeable enough to her companion, as she was well able to do, when so disposed, to all his sex.

The young barrister was prudent and sagacious beyond his years, and what he knew of the lady's behaviour, did not certainly prepossess him in her favour; but, nevertheless, he was obliged to confess to himself (although he omitted to do so to Letty) that Mrs Walter Lisgard was a very charming person. It is undeniable that a married woman may make herself twice as pleasant, for any short interval, like a railway journey, as any single one can do; she is not afraid of being considered too forward, or of laying herself out to captivate; while, if you are a bachelor with whose *tendresse* for any fair one she is acquainted, she will take you under her patronage, notwithstanding that you may be twice her age, and so sympathise with you, and identify herself with your absent

intended, that you are half inclined to squeeze her hand, and cover it with kisses. Mr Arthur Haldane had much too judicial a mind to give way to any impulse of that kind, but it was very nice to hear Rose eulogise her "darling Letty," and protest that the man who married her would find himself united with an angel. He quite forgot, under this soothing treatment, that his impression on leaving the Abbey was, that the two young ladies were not very good friends; nor did it occur to him at all that this privilege of matronly talk was being exercised by a bride not two months wedded, and whose surreptitious marriage had only been discovered about a week ago. When they had reached London, and were approaching her aunt's residence in the late afternoon, they found themselves

suddenly in a broad stream of vehicles, for the most part furnished with four horses, but very unlike the usual spick-and-span London equipages, being covered with white dust, and bearing traces of recent rapid travel.

"I quite forgot it was the Derby Day," exclaimed Arthur: "these are the gentlemen of the road, and I daresay your husband is among them."

Rose turned quite pale, and leaning back in the cab, did not again look out of window until they arrived at her aunt's door, where the two companions parted very good friends indeed. Rose gave a little sigh as she thanked him for his escort, which went—not indeed to the young man's heart, but a good way too.

"I hope Master Walter does not ill-treat

that poor girl," soliloquised Arthur as he drove away; "but I am almost certain that she 's afraid of him."

London after the Derby is more like Pandemonium even than on the night before; the winners are wild with joy, and inclined for any sort of dissipation; the losers also crave for the Circean cup, that they may temporarily forget their misfortunes. With the unusual roar of wheel and hoof in the streets, there mixes a still more unusual shouting; and from the open windows of places of entertainment, there streams forth the tangled talk which is confined within doors at other times. Before Arthur could reach the *Turf Hotel,* he learned from these sources, without further inquiry, that *The King* had won the race, in consequence of some mischance having happened to the

jockey of *Menelaus.* He knew, therefore, that Walter Lisgard had lost money. Still, when upon reaching his lodging he first set eyes upon the young dragoon, moodily stretched upon the sofa, with eyes staring straight before him, and a face as pale as the table-cloth, on which stood an untasted meal, he was astonished and shocked. For the moment —such a rigidity was there about those exquisite features—Arthur thought with a shudder that he was dead. Even after he entered the room, lit only from the glaring street, not a limb stirred, not a muscle moved to mark any consciousness of his presence; but when he exclaimed: "Walter! what's the matter, man?" the figure leapt up with a cry of pleasure, and took both his hands in his.

"I am glad to see you, Arthur," cried he.

"This is very kind of you, and I do not deserve it. I thought it was that infernal scoundrel Derrick."

"He is not here, then?"

"No; he may have come and gone, for all I know, for I believe I have been in a sort of nightmare; only it was a horse that caused it. Derrick's partner—or Derrick himself, for what I know—sold the race. I know what you are going to say, that you always told me how it would be"——

"No, indeed, Walter," interrupted Arthur kindly. "I am not come hither to reproach you. I am only the bearer of good news."

"I should like to hear some of that," said the other bitterly. "Where is it? Have you brought a loaded pistol with you? That would be the most friendly action you could do me just now, I believe."

"Walter, you should not talk like that," answered Arthur very gravely, for there was a look in his friend's eyes which seemed to harmonise only too well with his despairing words. "When we kill ourselves so philosophically, we forget how we wound others by that selfish act. Think of your mother, lad."

"Yes. She would be sorry, would she not?"

"It would break her heart, Walter; that's all. And besides, you have a wife now—yes, we all know it, and you're both forgiven — and why you have not written to her in answer to the letter she wrote you, none of us can imagine."

"I only got it this very day," groaned Walter. "Am I in a fit state to write upon business, think you?"

"Business!" echoed Arthur contemptuously;

"you're in a fit state to take a cab to Mayfair, and ask your poor wife's pardon. I brought her up to her aunt's house to-day myself."

"That's well," observed Walter reflectively; "for between you and me, Arthur Haldane"——

"Well, what?" exclaimed the barrister impatiently.

"Why, I think she'd better stay at her aunt's house altogether. The fact is, I've got no money to keep her."

"We know all about that, man"——

"The devil you do!" ejaculated Walter grimly; "then bad news must indeed fly apace. Look here, Haldane—I've lost *everything*. All that I have at present; all that I was to have when I came of age; all that I can expect from any human being who is

fool enough to leave me anything in time to come. I am a beggar, and worse than that, for I am a defaulter, and shall be proclaimed as such in a few days. That is the whole state of the case. *Now,* do you not think that the kindest office which a friend could do me, would be to help me with the means of blowing out, what would be in another man, his brains? For not only do I recognise myself a scoundrel, but as a senseless dolt and idiot, a fool of the first quality, and a"——

"You must owe, then, near seven thousand pounds," interrupted Arthur, with something like a groan.

"Just about that, so far as I have dared to look the thing in the face; all lost within twenty-four hours—most of it within three minutes."

"We must keep this from your mother

somehow, Walter. She has been sadly tried, and I doubt whether she could bear it."

"She must know it sooner or later, man, even if she doesn't read it in the papers. When your Turf gentry do not get paid, they make a noise about it, you see, that being all they can do. I've a precious good mind to take myself off to Cariboo—that's where this fellow Derrick made his money—the climate's good, and with a little capital, one may do a good deal. Why should I not go there, and never let them have a penny? The law looks upon it as a swindle, *you* know that well enough; and it *was* a swindle, by Jove! Come, you're a barrister, Haldane; now, what do you say about it?"

"No, Walter, I cannot advise you to act in that manner, and I am sure you did not propose it seriously yourself."

"O no, certainly not; I was only having a bit of fun," rejoined the other bitterly. "I am just in the humour for joking now, and can't resist it. Thousand devils! would you have me go to the workhouse, man, or where?"

"Nothing of that sort is at all necessary, Walter," answered the other quietly. "Of course, I was not prepared for this very unfortunate position of affairs; I had brought news that, through, I must say, the very generous behaviour of your elder brother, your income as a married man would in future be a very tolerable one; it has been made up to at least double what the interest of the sum you have lost would have produced. Thus, in addition to your pay, you would have had about six hundred a year, besides whatever your wife's aunt

might think proper to allow her. Your mother, on the other hand, undertakes, if you should scruple to accept this kindness at Sir Richard's hands"——

"Scruple? Certainly *not*," ejaculated Walter angrily. "I confess that I did not think my brother would have had so much proper feeling, and I am much obliged to him, of course; but, after all, he has only done his duty. What is three hundred a year out of the Lisgard rent-roll?"

"Still, he was not obliged to do it," observed Arthur drily.

"That is true; and, of course, you take the lawyer's view of it. Moreover, when he comes to hear of these debts, perhaps his Serene Highness may think proper to withdraw his gracious assistance."

"You do him very wrong, Walter," answered

Arthur with warmth. "Your trouble makes you say things you ought to be ashamed of —yes, ashamed of. Your brother, with all his faults, is incapable of committing such an act of cruelty. He is quite willing that you should both return to Mirk as soon as you please, but particularly that you should be present at his Coming of Age, which I am sure you will not fail to be. But if you will take my advice, you will not make your position known at Mirk, for, as I have said before, your mother has had enough to trouble her. You must let your sporting friends understand it, however, and we must make the best arrangements we can for your paying your debts within a year; and for the future, till something turns up, instead of six hundred per annum, you must manage to do on three. Your wife, I am sure, is a

most sensible young lady, and will easily perceive the necessity for economy."

"Thank you," answered the dragoon coldly. "Perhaps you would like to run down to Canterbury, and choose our lodging for us; or do you think we ought to be content to live in barracks? I know that there is a great temptation to insult a man when he is down; but for giving unpalatable advice in an offensive manner, I do not know your equal, Mr Arthur Haldane."

"Well, Walter, I have said what I thought right, and I do not intend to quarrel with you. I should wish, on the contrary, to remain your friend, if it were only for your dear mother's sake"——

"And somebody else's," interrupted the captain with a sneer.

"Yes; for your sister Letty's, Walter; I

frankly own that. Come, give us your hand, man.—Well, another time, then, when you are more like yourself.—But before I go, I want to find this man Derrick, for I have a letter for him of importance from Mistress Forest."

"You had better ask as you go down stairs, Mr Haldane; I know nothing about him." And with that, Captain Walter Lisgard deliberately turned his back upon his visitor, and looked gloomily out of the window; while his white hand stroked his silken moustaches as though it were a pumice-stone, and it was his intention to stroke them off.

Arthur made his inquiry of the servant who opened the hall-door to let him out.

"Mr Derrick—if that was the gentleman with the large beard—had come and gone

within the last quarter of an hour, while he (Haldane) had been talking with the other gentleman up stairs. He had called for his bill, and paid it, and packed his portmanteau, and there it was in the passage at the present moment."

"Then he must come back for *that*," exclaimed Arthur eagerly.

"No. He had left directions that it was to be sent on to him in a week or so to some place in the South. He had said that he should be walking, and therefore would not be there himself for several days. He had taken a knapsack with him as for a regular tour. He was a strange gentleman altogether."

Arthur Haldane stooped down, and read the address on the portmanteau—*Mr R. Derrick, Coveton;* then stepped very thought-

fully into the roaring street. "I don't know exactly why, and I certainly have no desire to know," muttered the young barrister to himself; "but of all the bad news I have learned to-night, I fear *ma mère* will consider this the worst. Why the deuce should this fellow be going to Coveton, of all places least calculated to attract such a scampish vagabond? Coveton, Coveton—yes, that is the place where my Lady came ashore from the wreck of the *North Star*."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LETTER FROM PARIS.

IT is the morning after the Derby Day, and Sir Richard, who has never had a shilling upon that national event, yet reads with interest the prose-poem upon the subject in the *Times*, over the breakfast-table, and even favours Letty—which is so unusual a piece of graciousness, that it almost suggests the idea of making amends for something—with extracts from the same, aloud. He and his sister are alone at the morning meal, for my Lady,

as is often the case now, has had her tea and dry toast sent up to her in her own room, as also a couple of letters—one from Arthur Haldane, and one with the Paris post-mark, and in a foreign hand.

"Lord Stonart is said to have netted forty thousand pounds: just think of that, Letty."

"Yes, Richard; but then think of the poor people that lost it."

"Poor people should not bet," returned the baronet severely. "I am sorry for Mr Chifney, since, if he had not quarrelled with his Lordship, the winner would have come out of his stables. As it was, he very nearly accomplished it with that French horse *Menelaus* — a success which I should, as an Englishman, have much deplored."

"Dear me! was not that the horse in which Walter was so much interested?"

"I am sure I don't know, Letty. I should think my brother had no money to spare for the race-course, under present circumstances: he could surely never be such a fool."

"Very likely not, Richard. I never said a word about his risking money; I only said he was 'interested.'"

"Ah!" rejoined the baronet significantly, "I dare say;" and then he began to whistle, as was not unusual with him when thoroughly displeased. Presently, however, recollecting that this was not a sociable sort of thing to do, Sir Richard abruptly observed: "Mamma had a letter from Paris this morning, and in a foreign hand; I wonder who her correspondent

is. I do not think she has heard from abroad since immediately after our poor father's death. Then I remember several of her old French friends wrote to her."

"I hope it is no ill news of any kind, for I am getting quite anxious about dear mamma, Richard. Ever since Christmas last, she has seemed to get more and more depressed."

"I have only observed it lately," answered the baronet, rather stiffly; "and I am sure we have not far to look for the reason.—By the by, there was a letter for her from Arthur Haldane also."

"Oh! was there?" said Letty carelessly, but turning a lively pink. Then after a short pause, during which the baronet resumed his paper: "If you will not have

another cup of coffee, Richard, I think I will go up and see mamma."

At that moment, the door opened, and my Lady herself entered the room. Her cheeks were ashy pale, but her eyes were beaming with excitement, and the hand in which she held an open letter trembled as she spoke. "Oh, I have got such good news, Richard!"

"What! from Arthur?" cried Letty. "Ah! I thought he would arrange everything as it should be."

Sir Richard frowned, and seemed about to speak, but did not do so.

"Yes, I have heard from Arthur too," said my Lady; "and very satisfactorily, although, perhaps, there may be matters which may require my presence in town for a day or two."

"You may always command my services, mother: I can start at five minutes' notice," said Sir Richard gravely.

"No, my dear boy; if I have to go at all—which is not certain—I shall certainly go alone, or rather with nobody but Mary. You will be full of preparations for your *fête*, I know, for one only comes of age once in one's lifetime; and besides, to tell you the truth, you would be of no use at all." Here she kissed him tenderly, and pushed her fingers through his brown curls lingeringly, as though she was already wishing him farewell. "But the good news I speak of is a much more selfish affair than you dream of. I have had a letter from my dear old friend, Madame de Castellan, who used to be so good to me when I was no older than you, Letty, at Dijon."

"I remember her," said Sir Richard. "She came to stay at the Abbey when I was about nine, did she not, and took such a fancy to dear old Belcomb? She said that she and I would marry so soon as I got old enough, and set up an establishment in the little cottage. A charming old lady, with snow-white hair, but a slight deficiency of teeth."

"Just so," answered my Lady. "She always vowed she would have nothing false about her, as long as she lived, and she is alive now, and apparently very hearty. But she has had some money losses, as well as certain domestic misfortunes, which induce her to seek an entire change of life. It is a most singular thing that you should have recollected her passion for Belcomb, for it is about that very place

that she has written. She wishes to know whether she could be our tenant there, at all events for the summer. The matter is in your hands, Richard, or will be so in a week or two, but I confess I should like to have her for a neighbour exceedingly."

"Then by all means write and say 'Come,'" cried the baronet; "and why not let her have Belcomb rent free? I dare say she would not mind our having our picnics there occasionally; and it is really no loss to me, for I don't believe anybody but herself would dream of taking it, except in the shooting season."

"Then that is arranged," answered my Lady joyfully. "I am to write by return of post," she says; "and if the letter says 'Yes,' that then we may expect her any day. She will bring her own French

maid; and I will drive over to-day, and arrange about old Rachel and her husband, who, of course, must be no losers, if they have to leave. That must be Madame's own affair, if she is really to have the place for nothing. See how affectionately the dear old lady writes, and what a capital hand, considering her advanced age!"

"Yes, indeed," said Sir Richard, elevating his eyebrows: "only, to say the truth, I am not good at French manuscript"——

"Although a master of that language, when in printed books," interrupted Letty.

"Well, the fact is they didn't teach that sort of thing at Eton in my time," answered the baronet frankly; "or, at all events, they didn't teach *me*. However, French is not so bad as German, that I

will say. One *can* pronounce it without speaking from the pit of one's stomach."

"Yes, one can—after a fashion," laughed Letty a little scornfully; but her elder brother seemed resolved to take all her bantering in good part that morning, as the imperial lion will sometimes tolerate the gambols of a companion kitten. "I don't think, however," she continued, "Madame de Castellan, who comes from Paris, will quite understand *you*, Richard. —How nicely she speaks of Mary, mamma. Why, how comes she to know so much about *her?*"

"Why, when I went to Dijon, before my marriage, Mary Forest went with me, you know, and remained there several years."

"Ah, yes, of course; I had forgotten."

"And when we were at the—the college,"

continued my Lady, with a slight tinge of colour, "Madame took pity upon us both, being foreigners, and was kind to us beyond all measure. Many a happy day have we passed in her pretty château together; and indeed I think I owe my Parisian pronunciation — of which you seem to make so much, Letty—at least as much to Madame de Castellan as to my paid teachers. She never could speak English, if you remember, Richard; everything she addressed to you had to be translated."

"Dear me," answered the baronet hastily, "I don't like that. I hope she has learned English since then. It places one in a very humiliating position to be talked to in a language one does not understand; unless you can treat the person as a savage, which, to say the truth, I always feel inclined to do."

"Well, Richard," said my Lady smiling, "if I am not at your elbow when Madame de Castellan calls, there will be always Letty here, who is cunning in such tongue-fence, to protect you; but, as a matter of fact, we shall see my poor old friend but very seldom. She is a good deal broken, I fear, by time, and still more by trouble"—here my Lady's own voice began to quaver a little—"and all she seems to desire is quiet and seclusion, before her day of rest at last shall dawn."

"She will be very welcome," answered Sir Richard tenderly. "I hope that you will cause everything for her comfort to be looked to at Belcomb, and I will again repeat my orders to Rinkel that the place is to be kept quite free from trespassers."

He rose and kissed his mother, then, as he left the room, delayed with his fingers on the door-handle, saying: "Have Walter and—and his wife consented to be present at my Coming of Age?"

"Certainly, dear Richard: they will both be very pleased to come—nay, Arthur thinks that they may return to the Abbey immediately. It is scarcely worth while for them to take a house, or rather lodgings, at Canterbury, since they are to be here so soon. Walter has leave now, it seems, and there will be no difficulty in getting it prolonged almost indefinitely: he can do anything he likes with his colonel, you know, as indeed"——

"Exactly," interrupted Sir Richard drily. "Then I suppose they will be back in a few days." And with that he placed the

door between himself and the threatened eulogy upon Master Walter.

"Was there any particular message for me, mamma?" inquired Letty demurely.

"From Walter? No, dear. He sent his ove to us all; but of course he feels a little embarrassed, and perhaps scarcely understands that he has been forgiven. Oh, I forgot: you meant was there any particular message from Arthur Haldane, you exacting little puss! Why, he only left us yesterday morning! But don't be vexed, my darling. You have won the love of a man who knows your worth almost as well as I do. He may not be so brilliant or so handsome as our darling Walter—and indeed who is?—but I must say he has shewn much better taste in choosing a wife. He has both wisdom and goodness, my darling child,

and I firmly believe your future happiness is assured."

"Yes, dearest mother, I do believe it; but"—— Here Letty's eyes began not only to sparkle, but to distil pearls and diamonds in the most lavish and apparently uncalled-for profusion.

"Why, what is the matter now, my love?" inquired my Lady.

"Nothing, mamma—nothing at least that I should have thought it worth while to tell you, had I not been overcome by your kind words. I know you have got troubles enough of your own; I did not mean to tell you, indeed I did not; I tried to forget it myself. Only last night, after you had gone to bed, Richard sat up with me talking about his future, and it seems he has made some plan for mine. He spoke of Mr Charles Vane as a person

he would like to have for a brother-in-law. He bade me be particularly civil to him at the coming *fête;* and when I said that I did not very much care about Mr Vane—and, in fact, that I had already—— O mamma, Richard said some very cruel things. He reminded me that one member of the family had already made a disreputable marriage"——

"That was an ungenerous speech, and very unlike my Richard," interposed my Lady with emphasis. "Why, he would have married Rose himself."

"So I have sometimes thought," replied Letty simply: "but to do him justice, I think he was referring to the clandestine character of the marriage rather than to the match itself. However, when he used the word disreputable in connection with Arthur

Haldane, he made me very angry, I own. I told him that Arthur was worth all the Vanes that had ever been born, whether there might have been nineteen generations of them (as he boasted) or a hundred and ninety. And I am afraid, dear mamma, that I snapped my fingers, and said I did not care *that*, when he accused dearest Arthur of not having a great-grandfather. At all events, Richard stalked out of the drawing-room vastly offended; and although he has been endeavouring to be extra civil to me this morning, I know that it is only that he may again introduce the very objectionable subject of Mr Charles Vane; and when I say 'No' with decision, as of course I shall do, I fear that he may take it upon himself to write to Arthur; and then, dearest mother, the Haldanes are so proud, you know, that I don't know what may happen."

Strange as it may seem, there had flitted across my Lady's face during this recital a look of something like Relief—for it surely could not have been Satisfaction—but it speedily gave place to that expression of distress that had become only too habitual to her once serene and comely features. Perhaps, accustomed to mischance as she now was, she had expected even more unwelcome news, and had felt momentarily thankful matters were no worse; but now all was gloom again.

"You were quite right to tell me this, Letty, even though it does give me a new cause for grief. If I know Arthur Haldane, he will not desert his betrothed wife on account of any slight that may be put upon him by any other human being. You may be quite at ease about that, I am very sure. But these

dissensions and disagreements among my own children—I know it is not your fault, dear Letty—but I feel that I cannot bear up under them. You will not have me with you here much longer."

"O mamma—dear, dear mamma, how selfish it was of me thus to afflict you further. But don't, don't talk like that. What should we do without you—you the sole bond that unites your boys together: and *I?* O mother, what would become of *me?* You don't know how I love you."

"Yes, darling, I do. You are tender-hearted as you are dutiful. And my boys, to do them justice, they love me too; but they are wearing me into my grave. At least, I feel it would be far better if I were lying there."

"O mamma, mamma," sighed Letty, covering

my Lady's tearful face with kisses, "you will break my heart if you talk so."

"You will have somebody better able to take care of you even than I, dear child, when I am gone. And I will see that it is so. Yes, I will leave directions behind me—you will find them in my desk, Letty; remember this, should anything happen to me —about that matter as well as other things. Richard will respect my wishes in such a case, I know, and will offer no opposition."

"But, dearest mother, do you feel ill," cried Letty in an agony, "that you talk of such things as these? Let us send for the doctor from Dalwynch. How I wish that Arthur's father could be prevailed on to come and see you! O mamma! I would rather die than you, although I am sure I am not half so fit for death!"

"Dear child, dear child!" sobbed my Lady. "It will be a bitter parting indeed for both of us—when the time comes. Perhaps it may not be so near at hand as I feared. In the meantime, rest assured, love, that if I feel a doctor can do me any good, he shall be sent for at once. But it is the mind, and not the body, which has need of medicine.—There, dry your eyes, and let us hope for the best. You will drive over with me this afternoon, will you not, to Belcomb? There is no time to lose in getting things ready there for our new tenant."

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